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MARRIAGE IN TRANSITION: GENDER, FAMILY AND MUSLIM SOCIAL REFORM IN COLONIAL INDIA

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Marriage in Transition: Gender, Family and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India

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Dedicated to my parents, *Rizwana Muzaffar Alam* and *Muzaffar Alam*

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Marriage in Transition: Gender, Family and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India

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This thesis examines how marriage amongst Urdu-speaking Muslims of colonial India was transformed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The thesis illustrates this transformation by investigating changes in public debate on key familial issues such as consent in marriages, appropriate marriageable age, women's education, polygyny, separation and divorce. Discourses on these questions are explored in hitherto unanalyzed archive of Urdu print culture particularly women's magazines, novels, pamphlets and commentaries published during the colonial period. Examining the various debates conducted in this space of Urdu press, this thesis makes three major arguments. First, the various reformist efforts and ideas expended in improving and remaking women during the colonial was driven by the larger push to redefine family, and that the 'women's question' triggered in social reform was, in effect, an agenda to remake and re-imagine the family. Secondly, these debates generated normative discourses of 'good wives' and 'good husbands' inhabiting an ideal familial space where relationships were supposed to be harmonious. These norms were centered on notions of 'respectability' and produced new role models for men and women. At the same time,

these debates also raised questions about the nature of the 'respectability' ideal, criticized the silence and complicity of reformers in generating social norms, and emphasized financial autonomy and choice for women. Thus, the social order envisaged in these debates cannot be called 'new patriarchy' of colonialism but involved forms of emancipation as well as control. Finally, this thesis argues that these familial and social changes were held together by a common desire to actualize and fashion a new form of 'Muslim self.' Islam and notions of Muslim identity were central to social reform, and there were varying opinions on it producing new dilemmas and predicaments about the colonial present. These discussions thus illustrate not just changing family history of South Asian Muslims but also a dynamic Muslim intellectual culture during the colonial period.

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Introduction

The history of marriage and family among Indian Muslims during the colonial period remains a crucial gap in modern South Asian historiography. This thesis seeks to explore that gap in our understanding. Specifically, I examine how marriage evolved and was transformed among the Urdu speaking population of Indian Muslims from late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The way I map the evolution and transformation of marriage is to follow some key familial issues that attracted discussion among Muslim literati and intellectuals of colonial India. These issues include women's education, consent in marriage, appropriate marriageable age, disagreement and marital discord, polygyny and the dissolution of marriages. In this thesis, I illustrate not just how each of these topics were intertwined with each other but also how they were connected to the larger question of women's rights, familial modernity and the construction of gender in Muslim society of colonial India.

The thesis makes three main arguments to shed light on Muslim familial modernity during the colonial period: first, I argue that the notion of 'perfecting women' was, in effect, based on the idea of 'perfecting family' and placed new prescriptive norms on men as well as women. [1] These norms produced role models for men and women based on the notion of 'conjugal respectability,' which was represented in the medium of the didactic social novel in Urdu literature. Other places where these images appeared was in the female centered space of Urdu women's magazines such as *Khātūn, Tahzīb-i Nisvān*

[1] I borrow the phrase 'perfecting family' from Barbara Metcalf's study of Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānavī's *Bihishtī Zewar.* Barbara Metcalf, trans., *Perfecting Women: Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānāvī's Bihishtī Zewar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

and *Ismat* although they carried a greater number of articles and stories devoted to the image of the 'good wife' rather than the 'good husband.' The site of discussion for these familial transformations was the Urdu press, and therefore a history of conjugality and family cannot be separated from the development and the flourishing of the public sphere of Urdu print.

Secondly, although these norms were based on notions of sexual difference, many of the issues directed at the respectable *sharīf* wife under the banner of familial reform were often encapsulated by the terms '*huqūq-i niswān'* (rights of women) and *'tahrīr-i niswān'* (freedom of women). Articles titled '*huqūq-i niswān'* and '*tahrīr-i niswān'* appeared with great frequency in women's magazines and confronted the challenges of lack of women's education, non-consensual marriages, polygyny and marital separation. Furthermore, by the mid 1920s, many writers questioned the nature of women's education and the role of domesticity, raised the prospect of women entering the labor force, financial autonomy, and the acquisition of agency through education. As a result, the new social order generated from the twin effects of communication technologies such as printing and the powerful thrust for women's education and familial reform cannot be referred to as 'new patriarchy' because it wasn't hegemonic in any simple, unilinear way.[2] This is not to deny that these social transformations lacked patriarchal privileges or that the social conditions of men and women were the same but that the burdens and demands of an increasingly competitive and changing colonial society produced new modes of conflict and collisions that could not be easily resolved by calls to overthrow male oppression.

[2] For an elaboration of the concept of colonial 'new patriarchy,' see Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Introduction," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History,* ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990): 1-26.

Finally, I argue that these familial and social changes were motivated by a desire to actualize and fashion a new form of 'Muslim self' that felt invigorated by the opportunity of service to the *qaum* (community). This passion for service was both an internal intellectual transmutation involving a re-interpretation of Islamic history as well as a public one including multiple responsibilities of societal transformation such as journalism, production of scholarship, fund raising, public action and formation of associations. Islam was central to reformers expectations of themselves and of society, and because it played such a crucial role, opinions differed as to what it meant, or should mean to be a 'Muslim,' which led to conflicts, debates and dilemmas. Furthermore, I would argue that even though these debates may have been engendered by the loss of Mughal political power and the establishment of colonial rule, they cannot be understood adequately through the paradigm of 'powerlessness' or 'decline.' On the contrary, they offered forms of agency and strategies for influence in social, economic and cultural life despite colonial rule, pitting values against each other. The efforts of reformers and modernists must be understood on their terms. Their engagement with the most critical questions of their day was an authentic attempt at a new imagination of society. This imagination was informed both from within including past traditions, and also from without, involving ideas associated with colonial rule. Neither a mere 'response' to colonial rule nor a repetition of the past, Muslim modernity had its own trajectory and confronted predicaments and challenges that were unique to itself, leaving many questions unresolved. Before I elaborate my arguments in greater detail, a brief comment on the politics of the present moment is necessary to highlight the significance of understanding gender and Islam in colonial India.

Muslim women have been the subject of intellectual debate in the last two decades particularly with the work of scholars like Saba Mahmood and Joan Scott. The key issues driving the debate about women and Islam is the politics that rests on a complex relationship between feminism, multiculturalism and liberalism. Liberal feminists increasingly see the claims by minority groups for protection of their cultural norms as threatening the rights of women within those groups, and multiculturalism as "bad for women."[3] Within the Indian context, these issues are encapsulated in the debates around Uniform Civil Code (UCC) that gathered political traction following the Shah Bano case in the late 1980s. One of the outcomes of these UCC debates is that any question related to family, women's rights or Islam in the last two decades in scholarly literature as well as in media keeps the State at the center of the conversation. While I do not dismiss the role of law and State legislation in improving the lives of women, this thesis is an attempt to shift the direction of the debate from an exclusive focus on 'personal laws' towards a more socio-cultural understanding of family involving a study of women's voices, shifting ideologies and beliefs, and construction of gender and sexual norms in novels and other forms of representation. Such a focus on socio-cultural history of Muslims is especially important given that most historical investigation on Muslims in the twentieth century has focused on politics of Muslim separatism or Partition, leaving developments in culture and social life to the origins of the Aligarh movement in late nineteenth

[3] Susan M. Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women,* ed. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 7-27.

century. Instead of substituting legal reform, I hope that this thesis complements the debate on law and family in colonial India.[4]

Gender, Family and Reform in Colonial India

The key question of this thesis is how institutions and ideas of the colonial period impacted familial, in particular marital, relationships within the Urdu-speaking Muslim household. What were the debates that ensued and what was the nature of disagreement. Much of these debates were enabled and acquired a trans-regional setting due to the development of print culture and subsequent changes in Urdu public sphere. [5]

Based on the theoretical formulation of Jurgen Habermas's 'public sphere,' there have been various studies devoted to the industry of publishing and the impact of print culture on the formation of social and national identities. [6] Francesca Orsini has proposed a "Hindi literary system" to demonstrate an enlarged vision of public space to locate the

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[4] For studies of law and gender, see Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters: Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Monmayee Basu, *Hindu Women and Marriage Law:From Sacrament to Contract* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996); Rachel Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India: Liberalism, Religious Law and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[5] Although an extensive study of Urdu print culture is still due, Nadir Ali Khan's *A History of Urdu Journalism, 1822-1857* is an exhaustive survey of various Urdu dailies that were published in different cities of the country particularly Delhi, Agra and Lucknow. Nadir A. Khan, *A History of Urdu Journalism* (Delhi: Idārah-i Adabiyāt-i Urdū Delhi, 2009).

[6] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* (Cambridge, MIT Press: 1989). For feminist critiques, see Joan Landes, *Women and Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988) and Nancy Fraser "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

reformist Hindi literature in its proper institutional context.[7] The development of the 'publicness' of Hindi ensured that "only such a language was fit for discussing 'public' matters, for creating literature, and for representing the jati."[8] In the Hindi literary system, institutions like the press, schools and publishing became concrete and discursive spaces for educated Indians. In these spaces language, ideas, literary tastes, and individual and group identities were reshaped, consciously as well as by the dynamics and momentum of each medium. Similarly, Naregal has demonstrated how upper caste intelligentsia in the Bombay-Pune region established their authority over the literate public sphere by 1880s and altered modes of learning and contestation in their favor. [9] In the context of Bengal, Anindita Ghosh has studied how print languages and literature became instruments for crafting social identities and illustrates how they offered opportunities to indigenous groups to consolidate power along multiple axes of gender, class and community. [10]

Critical to an understanding of the Muslim family in colonial India is the Urdu public sphere that acquired greater reach and expansion with the coming of the printed word. Urdu language formed its own cultural and intellectual community through institutional spaces of schools, press and the publishing industry. This thesis utilizes the archive of one such institutional space of publishing in Urdu language devoted particularly to social

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[7] Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[8] Ibid., 6.

[9] Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

[10] Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

reform. It is based on the analysis of little known essays and articles authored by women and men in reformist magazines especially *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat,* general commentaries and treatises on marriage and family along with rare novels written by women in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Urdu women's journals remain one of the richest archives for documenting changes in familial and social life of Muslims, and carried opinions on a range of topics including domesticity, marriage, parenting and child-rearing, education and politics. Gail Minault has demonstrated how women's journals that were started in several cities including Delhi, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Lahore and Aligarh strengthened networks of reform and promoted programs of women's education. [11] *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* was started by Sayyid Mumtāz Alī (Mumtāz Alī from here) in 1898 and was based in Lahore whereas *Ismat* was founded by Rāshid-ul Khairī and had its offices in Delhi. [12] The nature of writing contained in these two major magazines shows a variety of genres such as short stories, serialized novels, news articles, letters and autobiographical columns conveying personal experiences.

In addition to women's magazines, the other major primary source of analysis in this thesis is the Urdu novel. With its association with giants like Nazīr Ahmad Dehlavī (Nazīr Ahmad from here) and Altāf Hussain Hālī (Hālī from here), the Urdu novel from its inception was connected with reformist movements and advocacy of women's education. Later in the twentieth century, women writers such as Akbarī Begum, Zafar Jahān Begum, Muhammadī Begum, Khātūn Akram, Anwarī Begum and Jamīlā Begum all employed the didactic novel to discuss commitments and obligations of family

[11] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1998): 105-57.
[12] Ibid., 110-150.

relationships. Their writings remain an invaluable source for understanding beliefs about gender, family and domesticity. A brief discussion then about the use of literature in the writing of history is necessary here. If the novel were theorized not just as an aesthetic product but also as a historical one, then the socio-cultural context which informs it and in which it is produced cannot be ignored. Michael McKeon has argued that "central to the theorization of the novel as a historical entity is the premise that the novel, the quintessential modern genre, is deeply intertwined with the historicity of the modern period, with modernity itself." [13] The centrality of the home, of family and of friends in the genre of the novel attests to the separation and autonomization of the 'social' in the modern period, and the growing emphasis on privacy, individuality and the familial life of the individual. But more importantly, the critical role of narratives particularly novels in understanding gender norms and notions of sexual difference has been pointed out by several scholars.

Nancy Armstrong, for instance, has explored the rise of novel in England and the impact they had in constituting gender difference and transformation of social relationships. Armstrong contends "that narratives which seemed to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage in fact seized the authority to say what was female, and that they did so in order to contest the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines."[14] She shows that modern, gendered form of subjectivity developed first as a feminine discourse in certain literature

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[13] Michael McKeon, "Introduction," in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach,* ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2000): xv.

[14] Nancy Armstrong, "From Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel," in *The Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach,* ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000): 468.

for women and it was through this gendered discourse that the discourse of sexuality made its way into common sense and determined how people understood themselves and what they desired in others. [15]

Similarly, Mary Poovey in her seminal work on gender in mid-Victorian England has demonstrated how the social construction and deployment of images in Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* performed the critical ideological work of gender in tandem with social institutions and developments in law and medicine. Representations of gender, according to Poovey, was one of the sites on which "ideological systems were simultaneously constructed and contested" and "the sites at which the struggles for authority occurred, as well as the locus of assumptions used to underwrite the very authority that authorized those struggles."[16] More importantly, she states that "location and organization of difference are crucial to a culture's self-representation and its distribution of power."[17]

Based on Poovey's critical assumption that representation in cultural forms such as the novel reveals how difference and especially sexual difference is understood and organized in society, I have also drawn inferences about domesticity, role of women in the family, gender and sexual difference in the colonial society of Indian Muslims from the novels published in this period more so because they were directed specifically for the purpose of re-ordering gender relations in society. The genre of the 'didactic novel' was extremely popular during the colonial period and it conducted the ideological task of

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[15] Ibid., 469.
[16] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 2.
[17] Ibid., 199.

upholding traditional gender norms and also partially subverted them by giving rise to the figure of the 'woman writer.'

In their volume on social reform in modern India, Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar argue that a critical outcome of the changes in the domestic sphere during the colonial period was that "we are also introduced to a new social category that was a crucial sign of modern times: that of the woman writer."[18] Feminist historians have viewed the task of placing the lives and views of women into established and normative narratives of history as a corrective that not only sheds light on resistance against patriarchy in history but also questions the nature of historical writing and method where the dominant historical actor is no longer male/white but a figure on the 'margins' of society. [19]

As a contribution towards such feminist scholarship, one of the central aims of this thesis is the 'recovery of the female voice.' I hope to show that the reform movement didn't only include well known names like Nazīr Ahmad, Hālī and Sayyid Ahmad Khān but acquired depth in society and had many participants from small towns as well as big and included numerous unknown individuals particularly women who were sometimes simply called 'A. Kh' or 'Aik Badāyun' (One from Badāyun) but still changed the nature of conversation. One encounters a list of female names as one browses through the files of Urdu women's magazines. In the twentieth anniversary edition of *Ismat* published in 1928, for instance, Rāziq-ul Khairi, son of Rāshid-ul Khairī and the then editor of *Ismat* mentioned several writers who had contributed regularly for years adding to the success

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[18] Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, "Introduction," *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader,* ed. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008): 4.

[19] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

of the journal. The list includes women from all over the country and mentions names like Anīs Fātimah from Barah Banki, Bilqīs Jamāl Khātūn from Barielly, Bilqīs Samad from Peshawar, Hamīda Begum Khairī from Delhi, Khurshīd Āra Begum from Amravati, Rābia Khātūn from Muzaffarnagar, Rāzia Ryāz from Gurgaon, Zehrā Fyzee from Bombay, Sādiqa Khātūn from Monger, Sughrā Humāyun Mirzā from Hyderabad, Zafar Jahān Begum from Barielly, Ayesha Begum from Lahore, Ismat-un-nissā from Hyderabad, Fatima Begum from Bangalore, Nawāb Qamar Jahān Begum from Lucknow, Latīf Begum from Lahore, Mrs. Yusuf Zaman from Lucknow, Mumtāz Rafī Begum from Bhopal, V.A from Bhopal, Mehr-un-nissā from Nelore and Nazr Sajjād Hyder from Aligarh. [20]

At the same time, on the public stage of social reform that included associations, press and informal networks, different individuals amongst both genders had varying levels of influence and visibility. Keeping this in mind, I hope to depict voices of not just unknown women but also unknown men.

Harmony and Discontent in the Family

Most studies of Muslim social reform in colonial India have focused on women's education and the formation of new social identities through the process of 'remaking women.'[21] Barbara Metcalf has argued that by opening learning of Islamic scripture to women, Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānavī adopted a 'single standard' for men as well as women and sought to remake women into 'perfect' Muslims just like men. At the same,

[20] Rāziq-ul Khairī, "bīsway sāl kay mazmūn nigār," (The Article Writers of Twenty Years) *Ismat* Vol. 41 No. 1 (June 1928): 21-29.

[21] The phrase 'remaking women' is based on Lila Abu-Lughod's description of the process of feminism and modernity in the Middle East. Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

however, the 'Muslim woman' constructed in his *Bihishtī Zewar* was not to question the social hierarchy and remained subordinated to men in the family. [22] Highlighting further the uniqueness of reform amongst the *ulema,* she also adds that many of their views about women "arose largely independent of any engagement with European critiques of Indian women and they did not define themselves by either emulating or opposing a European pattern." [23] Instead of any western influence, they claimed to be based on 'tradition' but as Metcalf argues, 'they constructed the notion of an 'authentic tradition' which was characteristic of colonial rule.

In a detailed study of social reform, Gail Minault has argued that control over women's behavior was an "essential aspect of the reformers economic, social and religious programs." [24] Women and their education became a site for both what was worth preserving and what needed to be changed, and they became an important symbol for culture and religious life. Minault's main focus is on the 'generation of reform,' men and women born around 1857 whose education combined both Islamic and western systems of learning, and who set up associations and schools for women, and published novels and magazines. Much of Minault's work lays out the basic frame of Muslim social reform and identifies its most important figures, texts and associations. Utilizing the rich archive of Urdu magazines, novels and other reformist texts, this thesis builds upon the

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[22] Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānavī's Bihishtī Zewar: Partial Translation with a Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 10-27.

[23] Barbara Metcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim Women," in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan,* ed. Barbara Metcalf (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004): 107.

[24] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 6.

work of Metcalf and Minault to delineate marriage and family values amongst Muslims of colonial India.

One of the most characteristic features of Urdu reform literature published during the colonial period is the idealization of hetero-normative familial form. It subordinated various forms of intimacy and desire to the domestic space, and produced images of the 'good family' that included women as virtuous mothers and good wives, and husbands as loyal sons and disciplined, hard-working men. Both Metcalf and Minault have highlighted education of women and remaking of their selves as the primary thrust of reformist movements. In this study, I argue that since one of the major ambitions of social reform was to uphold the family unit as a necessary and an 'ideal' social institution in society, it inevitably generated representations of idealized conjugality and affective ties that could not exclude the remaking of masculine norms as well. Thus, what emerged repeatedly in reformist literature was an image of the 'ideal marriage' or what was necessary to build the foundation of 'respectable conjugality.'

By shifting the focus from women to conjugality, this thesis attempts to employ gender as a category of analysis where the roles of both husbands and wives are redefined in favor of *sharāfat* or 'respectability.' The concept of *sharāfat* or 'respectability' needs some explanation here. Minault has argued that in the colonial period, the meaning of *sharāfat* shifted from being traits implying birth to 'noble' in the sense of acquiring good character. They were virtues that could be acquired through education and to be *sharīf* was to belong to the respectable middle or upper-middle class, and also be virtuous. [25] Thus class, culture, education and education were all interconnected to produce *sharāfat*

[25] Ibid., 5.

as a process of colonial reform. Instead of focusing only on respectability as a marker of femininity, this thesis expands its domains to family and discusses notions of 'respectable' conjugality. [26]

Associated with this concern for 'respectable conjugality' was an underlying reformist imagination of complete harmony within the family where conflict is minimum, friendship and amity exist between husband and wife, elders are respected and the household is run smoothly. This harmony could be achieved if proper consent was acquired, and husband and wife were educated to value domesticity and family. Chapters two and three elaborate this concept of 'respectable conjugality' and notions of familial harmony. In chapter two, I discuss four Urdu texts that redefined boundaries of intimacy in support of the harmonious family orienting their discourses towards the conjugal tie and elaborating norms for a happy marital life. The four texts under consideration in the second chapter, *Islāh-i Hayāt, Falsafah-yi Izdivāj, Hidāyat-un-nissā* and *Rafīq-i Arūs* highlight differences between men and women on the visions of conjugality and reveal how gender and norms of sexual differences were constructed differently amongst men and women.

In chapter three, I discuss how issues of choice, education, consent, and appropriate marriageable age became points of contention in the ideology of 'respectable' conjugality. Consent was variously defined and there was little unanimity on how it could

[26] Tithi Bhattacharya has demonstrated the emergence of the *bhadralok* intellectual and the cultural formation of middle and upper class in Bengal through the process of modern education. Tithi Bhattacharya, *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education and colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005). Sanjay Joshi in his study of middle class formation in colonial north Indian between 1880 and 1930 says that being middle class was primarily a project of self-fashioning. Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

be acquired given the strict norms of gender segregation. In novels written especially by women, consent usually implied marital compatibility and if the husband and wife were compatible or educated in a similar vein of reformist ideals, the families of both the bride and the groom agreed whole-heartedly to the union. On the other hand, an incompatible marriage marked by differences in education implied lack of consent and was portrayed negatively by several women writers such as Nazr Sajjād Hyder, Abbāsī Begum, Zafar Jahān Begum and Jamīlā Begum.

Following a discussion of the major themes involved in the ideal of family harmony, I elaborate the breakdown and the crisis points of reformist ideology in chapters four and five. The debates of polygyny and divorce suggest that ideals of 'respectable' conjugality and the aspiration for absolute familial happiness were often disconnected with the views and experiences of Muslim women. The voices of women in these chapters shed light on the desire for a more egalitarian social order, and illustrate discontent and confusion against the hegemonic ideals. As a result of these voices that interrupt the hegemonic discourse, I argue here that dominant institutions of social reform such as magazines or associations did not generate a new colonial patriarchy but also gave authentic expression to the possibility of a new social order. Reform thus emerges to be a contested terrain where modes of social control and new forms of emancipation were simultaneously in confrontation with each other.

In chapter four, I discuss different positions that were adopted on the issue of polygyny. Like the issue of *sati,* I demonstrate that the debate on polygyny was marked by ambiguity amongst reformers and could never achieve a consensus that would allow legislative action against it. Men and women found polygyny legitimate for different

reasons, and the practice survived and even thrived with changes associated with modernity. Despite the failure to obtain any law against polygyny, I lay out a strong condemnation of polygynous marriages by women writing in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Khātūn* and emphasize the key features of the debate when it reached its peak in the anti-polygyny resolution adopted at the All India Muslim Ladies Conference of 1918.

In chapter five, I discuss the main views of reformers on the question of separation and divorce. For most Muslim modernists of the nineteenth century, divorce was an acceptable and necessary practice for the maintenance of family. The question of termination of marriage initiated by a woman, however, remained a tricky issue and it was addressed within the Islamic framework of *khula.*[27] In addition to issues of separation and divorce, I also show how the Muslim custom of *mehr* was intertwined closely with divorce, polygyny and woman's autonomy in the marital contract. Finally, in this chapter, I do a close analysis of Syeda Bāno Ahmad's autobiography, *Dagar se Hat Kar* (Different from the Norm) to illustrate how the ideals associated with 'reformed marriages' could fail in achieving harmony or happiness. At the same time, the life of Syeda Bāno Ahmad also highlights what became possible for 'daughters of reform.'

Finally, in each of the chapters mentioned above, the question of women's education is never entirely abandoned and remains an idea that foregrounds all reformist approach to marriage and family. In order to fully understand the nature of these debates on family, conjugality and marriage, I revisit the question of women's education in chapter one and analyze some texts that highlight a diversity of conversation on this issue in late nineteenth century. When these texts are read in conjunction with Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī,

[27] *Khula* is an Islamic practice where a woman may initiate the termination of marriage but only through the mediation of a *qāzī* (jurist).

the relationship between domesticity and women's education in reformist ideology at least in the nineteenth century appears precarious. The strong union between the notion of 'family harmony' and 'women's education' that became prominent in early twentieth century was thus not definite or given during the earlier period of reform movement.

Limitation

In conclusion, a note must be mentioned about the limitations and silences of this investigation. Most of the discourses and debates illustrated in this thesis are drawn primarily from Urdu novels, women's magazines and some general commentaries on marriage and education. As discussed earlier, the people who produced this literature and audience to which it addressed was a particular group of Muslim elites who took pride in their cultural (and biological) lineage and found employment with the British government during the colonial period. Therefore the claims to 'Islam' and 'Muslims' made in these conversations are not absolute but only representative of a particular form of Muslim identity and Islam that was associated with the reformist movement of Urdu-speaking Muslims. The claims to 'Islam' and 'Muslim' included here reflect an *aspiration* of a community of people to gain control and establish their self-definitions as authoritative. Thus this study lacks voices of lower class, subaltern or laboring groups of Muslims and is not a 'total history' of the family lives of Muslims in colonial India.

Chapter 1: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform

Any exploration of familial transformation in colonial India must involve an engagement with the question of women's education. All the familial issues that gathered attention of reformers including child marriage, polygyny, consent and marital compatibility were deeply intertwined with the advocacy of women's education. Before we lay out the nature of debate on conjugality and family, it is therefore necessary to revisit the issue of women's education itself and understand in greater detail the backdrop to the contentious debates on family.

Most of the debate in South Asian historiography on women's education in the nineteenth century has highlighted the mode of fiction and the modern Urdu novel particularly texts by Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī to delineate arguments for reform. [28] In this chapter, I explore two more texts on women's education that employed narrative strategies different from the novel and were also composed in the late nineteenth century. The two texts under analysis are *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* (Lamp of Counsels) by Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān published in 1870 and *Favāid-un-nissā* (Benefits for Women) by Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī published in 1871. [29]

In 1868, William Muir, British lieutenant-governor of the North-West Provinces announced that 'useful' books written in vernacular languages particularly those for women would be rewarded by the government. Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs* (The

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[28] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14-58; Ruby Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth Century India: The Girl Child and the Art of Playfulness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 125-167.

[29] Both these texts and authors have not been examined before in South Asian historiography. There is a lack of biographical information on their lives or their writings.

Bride's Mirror) won a prize for its author and was recommended for inclusion into school syllabi. [30] Both Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān and Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī responded to the government's announcement and submitted their texts for the competition. The similarity of the contexts of production of *Mirāt ul-Arūs, Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Favāid-un-nissā* is important for understanding the debate on women's education in late nineteenth century particularly when one considers the nature of their discourses. I will return to this question after an analysis of *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Favāid-un-nissā.*

Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān's *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* is written in the form of a courtroom drama occurring in an allegorical court called 'Court of Humanity' where two fictional characters named Aqīl-un-nissā, speaking on behalf of women, and Mardān-i Hind Khān, representing men, argue against each other to make their case for women's education. Aqīl-un-nissā as the voice of Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān argues in favor of women's education while Mardān-i Hind Khān displays common beliefs about the ignorance of women and hopes to discredit Aqīl-un-nissā. The structure of *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* especially its juridical context and the format of an argumentative dialogue remain its most distinctive features. While the purpose of the text was advocacy and the propagation of a particular point of view, the explicit encounter with an adversarial position in a dialogue form in a legal court allows us to encounter a different genre of exposition in the debate on women's education. The writing genre of a dialogue reveals not just a proposition but

[30] See C.M Naim, "Prize-winning Adab: A Study of Five Urdu Books written in Response to the Allahabad Government Gazette Notification," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 290-314.

also makes visible the process involved in the nature of argument.[31] Such a format of writing involves a speaker who posits views, listens to its objections and questions, formulates further rebuttals and engages throughout the conversation in a back-and-forth interaction with another individual. In our example of *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat,* what makes it unique is the larger legal background of the Court of Humanity demonstrating Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān's opinion that the question of women's education is eventually an issue of securing justice in society.

Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī's *Favāid-un-nissā,* on the other hand, is written as a direct proposition where the author argues in favor of women's education largely through a re-interpretation of Islamic doctrine in particular the Qurān. This activity of reasoning involving an engagement with revealed texts or *ijtihad* has been a continuous tradition and integral to the practice of Islamic law, Qurānic exegesis and Hadith criticism. The practice of *ijitihad* was not merely speculative but 'pragmatic' involving "the depiction of the past in a normative form and its adaptation to the present conditions with the purpose of illustrating a system of morals."[32] Both Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān and Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī use the technique of *ijtihad* continuing an intellectual tradition of Islam to respond to contingencies of their own time.

Muhammad VazĪr AlĪ Khān's *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* was published in 1870 and begun under the behest and patronage of William Muir. The text carries a dedication to William Muir in English that commends him for his "liberal and kind patronage to the progress of

[31] Peter Womack, *Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2011); 9-36.
[32] Wael B. Hallaq, " Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 16, No., 1, (March 1984): 12.

female education, the education of public in general and of Urdu literature in India." [33] Following the dedication in English is a similar acknowledgment in Urdu praising William Muir for his efforts in the spread of Urdu language and female education in India. [34]

In the preface to the text, Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān (Khān from here) gives detailed reasons for writing a treatise in support of women's education. The structure of Khān's reasoning also sheds light on how he came to pose lack of education amongst women as a problem. For Khān, the received wisdom about the temperament of women presented a predicament that he couldn't easily resolve. He writes that "since childhood, this ignorant mortal had been indoctrinated with the idea that women are full of evil and that it is very necessary to abstain from their company and that one should, to the extent possible, refrain from being close to them." [35] Upon reaching maturity, he started to doubt these beliefs but was unable to abandon them completely because it carried the force of endorsement from most people in society particularly the elder members of his family. But after hearing the news that a prize by William Muir awaited those writing on education, he believed "that what I had kept in my heart for ages could be expressed." [36] Starting on 25 December 1868, he finished the text in three days on 28 December 1868 and sent it for publication on 30 December 1868. [37] Much to his happiness, he was even

[33] Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān, *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* (Lahore: 1870), 1.
[34] Ibid., 3
[35] Ibid., 5.
[36] ibid., 30
[37] ibid., 39, 31

awarded a moderate sum in prize money. Khān also expressed his desire that the book be taught to children including both boys and girls.[38]

To prepare for the text and to fully validate his beliefs, Khān closely observed women and their relations with men in society, and arrived at two conclusions. Firstly he rejects the charge that women are ignorant through a re-interpretation of Islamic discourse where he claims that God could not have created Adam's companion ignorant because that would violate his own creation. Secondly, he attributes the lack of education amongst women to poverty and the weak socio-economic status of families in India.

Invoking his faith in religious tradition, Khān asks "how could it be possible that God made such a bad and worthless person as a companion to Adam. This is contrary to his divine grace and can never be considered amenable to human understanding, and is impossible." [39] For Khān, what follows from his belief in God's creation is the foundation for basic humanity between men and women because

> no intelligent person will accept that women are by temperament wicked and one must also think how one can accept this. Saying it will imply that you are accusing gods of making women stupid, and both men and women are children of God. Following this logic, both should be the same.[40]

To further examine his beliefs about women, Khān also read several books and writes that

> In these books, I only found that women are presented wicked in nature and that the wisest amongst them invent a variety of deceptions and tricks. But nowhere did I

[38] Ibid., 38
[39] Ibid., 8
[40] Ibid., 18.

> find how and why the nature of women should be so flawed, and how I could save myself from this difficulty. Then I started to reflect on the ideas in these books and after much thinking realized that they are written to instill spurious and baseless thoughts about women. [41]

Thinking along these lines, Khān writes that it occurred to him that the reason for such beliefs must be in people themselves, and that the real problem was the exclusion of women from education. [42] Arguing against any difference between men and women, he says that "God created Adam and his companion in the same vein and bestowed upon both of them with the same wisdom and sensibilities" and that "this reasoning is human heritage and can be directed towards whatever one wishes, either towards evil or towards virtue. But with education, this reasoning will favor virtue." [43] Reflecting upon this idea, Khān concludes that "it became clear to me that there is no actual difference between men and women if they are deprived of the blessings and wealth of knowledge." [44]

Referring to his earlier received convention, Khān says that it was perpetuated out of fear in much the same way that Greeks practiced idolatry or in the way that Galileo was forced to accept ideas contrary to his findings. [45] Therefore, for Khān,

> in reality that advice and those points that the ancient sages made about refraining from the company of women should have been written about the company of ignorant people in general, and similarly whatever defects they had attributed to helpless, poor women should have been attributed to ignorant people because in

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[41] Ibid, 9
[42] Ibid., 10
[43] ibid., 11, 12.
[44] Ibid, 12
[45] Ibid., 14,15

reality all those qualities are of the uneducated and ignorant, whether they are male and female.[46]

Khān cites the qualities of excellence, eminence, respect, awe, éclat, charisma, piety, patience, contentment and asceticism that belong to the educated and claims that "without these qualities, the only difference that remains between an uneducated human and an animal is that of speech." [47] Citing a transformational impact of education on human character, Khān writes that "in the end, I resolved this difficulty with a simple formula: that is to say that the bad influence of women due to ignorance will be removed with education." [48]

After rejecting the theory about the inferiority of women, Khān shifts his analysis to economic conditions in society demonstrating the relationship between poverty and illiteracy of women. According to Khān, one of the consequences of illiteracy of women is poverty. Focusing on the education of young boys, he says that they begin their basic training in reading at around eight or nine, read Persian texts such as *Golistan* or *Bostan* by twelve or fourteen, and are then married off at the age of fifteen. If the father is alive at the son's age of fifteen, he usually decides to retire from his own job because his son is now employed and devotes his post-retirement days to religious activity. The result of such decisions by fathers, claims Khān, is that the son is not only forced to make proper arrangements for his own children but also support his parents.[49] Thus in the fifteenth

[46] Ibid., 15.
[47] Ibid., 17
[48] ibid., 19
[49] ibid., 21.

year itself, the young boy's life becomes burdensome and miserable, and he suffers undue pressure to find better and better employment to support his entire family. [50]

Highlighting the imbalance between the desire for clerical jobs in the colonial government with the huge numbers of men seeking it, he asks "how can there be sufficient openings and opportunities when all the people of the world perform only one occupation of clerical work…how can the whole country live on the profession of being a clerk." [51] To solve this problem of unemployment and poverty, he argues that people in the country should acquire greater learning and skills in vocational jobs or handicrafts.[52] Extending this argument for diversity in professions to the education of women, Khān says that if Indian women, like the British, also get an education and become knowledgeable and skilled by fifteen, it would be a wonderful possibility for the family.[53] Khān here doesn't explicitly mention female employment or that women should contribute to household income in an age of clerkdom but only insinuates it by pointing a connection between illiteracy of women and poor households throughout the country.

In the closing pages of the preface, Khān attributes his reasons for writing the text to "love for his country." [54] Expressing proto-nationalist sentiment, he wishes that royal families or those in charge share his love for the country and be willing to implement his ideas.[55]

Following the preface, Khān begins his text in praise of God and Prophet with the Persian verses of poet Mirzā Mazhar Jān-i Jānān. As mentioned earlier, the basic

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[50] Ibid., 22.
[51] Ibid., 23.
[52] Ibid., 23.
[53] Ibdi., 24.
[54] ibid., 27
[55] ibid., 27

structure of the whole argument in *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* is constructed juristically in which two fictional plaintiffs named Aqīl-un-nissā, representing women of the country, and Mardān-i Hind Khān, speaking on behalf of men, present their perspectives to a judge in a court called 'Court of Humanity.' Through a variety of illustrations and stories about men and women from history and religion, Khān illustrates the legal combat of Aqīl-un-nissā and Mardān-i Hind Khān in which Mardān-i Hind Khān argues for superiority of men over women and Aqīl-un-nissā refutes those dominant beliefs. Through this allegorical judicial setting, Khān translated the issue of women's education into a dialogical debate concerned primarily with questions of fairness and equity. Furthermore, the trope of legality and justice implicit in this style of writing is a significant departure from other texts of reform that employed the novel for persuasion.

What is conspicuous in *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* is the explicitly colonial character of the legal context in particular the beginning of the case. Aqīl-un-nissā starts her plea with the following statement:

> not only in Hindustan but in the whole world, men have made accusations and allegations against women; allegations that they abuse and that they carry baseless and false ideas in their hearts. Rightly or wrongly, men have kept them deprived of education and training. And in their descriptions of the deceptive and disloyal nature of women, they have written hundreds, nay even thousands, of absolutely baseless books with fantastic and fabricated stories.[56]

[56] Ibid., 44.

In order to counter these claims, Aqīl-un-nissā reasons that she has "come to the court of justice-loving William Bahadur to submit my petition for justice and to get our rights." [57] Following this plea, William Muir refers the case to 'Court of Humanity' where it is adjudicated by a character named Khan Bahadur and settled in favor of Aqīl-un-nissā. Muir then suggests that the case be published as a treatise for the benefit of the country. The colonial context of the Khān's argument is unmistakable and illustrates the expectations of some Indian elite from the colonial administration.

In addition to the colonial framework of the dispute between Aqīl-un-nissa and Mardān-i Hind Khān, the nature of Khān's argument is also rooted in pre-colonial Indo-Persianate tradition. Accompanying Aqīl-un-nissā to 'Court of Humanity' are four witnesses, Bahār Dānish Begum, Nawratan Jān, Tutī Begum and Alif Lailā Begum, named after female characters from the Persian *dastan* tradition. Khān even mentions in footnote the corresponding *dastans* associated with each of the witnesses. [58] After Aqīl-un-nissā presents her petition, Khan Bahadur asks Mardān-i Hind Khān to address Aqīl-un-nissā and defend himself. Mardān-i Hind Khān then proceeds to list several poor qualities of women calling them disloyal, inconsiderate, shameless, cruel, dishonest, jealous, angry, hateful, short-tempered, ungrateful, greedy, deceptive, hypocritical and full of bad etiquettes. Claiming that these traits are all inherent in their nature, he attributes the observations of common people as evidence for his allegation.[59] In her response, Aqīl-un-nissā mentions Khān as her 'trainer' from which she learned historical

[57] Ibid., 45.
[58] Ibid., 45.
[59] Ibid., 50.

details.[60] Here, typical of several other male reformers, Khān clearly presents himself as the educator of women shaping their instruction to his ideas.

Continuing her response, Aqīl-un-nissā begins with the story of Adam and Eve and their two sons, Cain and Abel. Arguing that Adam is the father of humanity, she says that God created Eve from his left thigh because Adam was alone in the garden and was scared to live alone. In Eve, Adam would find a friend and a compassionate, selfless companion.[61] She also mentions the murder of Abel by his elder brother Cain. Calling Cain as the first man born out of a woman's womb, Aqīl-un-nissā describes the murder as a sin. But even before the sin of Cain, Aqīl-un-nissā says that their father Adam had committed the sin of eating the grain of wheat, which was forbidden for him. Considering Adam's act, "tell me," asks Aqīl-un-nissā, "is the inventor of sin a man or a woman?" [62]

Aqīl-un-nissā's question ends the first day in the Court of Humanity and she comes home to her female friends excited by her performance. On the other hand, Mardān-i Hind Khān and his friends get worried and start reading various books such as *Shāhnāmeh, Rozat al-safa, Khulasat al-tavaīikh, Tawaraikh-i Nādir* and *Tārīkh-i Farishtā* to prepare their arguments for the next day.[63] Khān writes that despite this effort, the men only ended up discovering "nothing except their own deceptions, their atrocities, their cruelty, their blood-shedding and their destructive actions." [64] On the second day of trial, Mardān-i Hind Khān proceeds to build his argument further against Aqīl-un-nissā. Accusing her of leaving out half of the story, he says that Adam ate at the

[60] Ibid., 51.
[61] Ibid., 52.
[62] Ibid., 54.
[63] Ibid., 55.
[64] Ibid., 56.

behest of Eve. Against these allegations, Aqīl-un-nissā responds that even if one accepts Eve's wrongful conduct, one would also have to question at the same time Adam as a man of wisdom. [65]

After the dispute over the stories of Adam and Eve, Mardān-i Hind Khān shifts his focus to property rights for women in the Qurān. He argues that greater share of property for men compared to women proves that women have less stature than men. In much the same vein, women also have a lower status in matters of state management. Inserting himself again in the narrative, Khān as the voice of Aqīl- un-nissā contravenes Mardān-i Hind Khān saying that "having noticed this, I asked Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān to give reasons for this distinction. He told me that this was so because in the share of men was included the expenses of children along with the share of relatives, the poor and the orphans while in the women's share, this was not included."[66] In addition to this clarification, Aqīl-un-nissā also adds that it is commanded in the Torah much like the Qurān that one respect both parents regardless of gender and not discriminate between mother and father.[67]

In her second line of defense, arguing metaphorically through the device of a parable, Aqīl-un-nissā narrates an encounter between a lion and a human to criticize male domination in affairs of state and polity. In the story, both the lion and the human look at a picture in which a man was attacking a lion, with a great show of courage and awe while the lion appeared defeated and scared. Addressing the lion while looking at the painting, the human commended his own courage in killing the lion. The lion responds

[65] Ibid., 59.
[66] Ibid., 60-61.
[67] Ibid., 61.

that the fault lies in the hands of the painter who, as a human being, displayed his own species as dominant. If a lion had made the painting, the depiction would have been very different. Expounding on the logic further, the lion narrates another story to the human. It is reported, the lion says, that once upon a time in the royal court of Nawshirwan, there hung an ugly and dirty painting of the Satan. On one occasion, a kind human saw Satan and realized that his face wasn't ugly and rather different from that of the picture. When asked how such a contradiction between the picture and reality could exist, the Satan simply said that the painting brush was in control of a human being.

Building upon these two stories, Aqīl-un-nissā argues that the ruler, the king, the lawmaker have all been men and having inflicted cruelty, punishment and suffering upon men starting with Cain and followed by several other men, they still fault women with accusations and exonerate themselves. Addressing men, Aqīl-un-nissā says that "because you people are the makers of law and have the power of ruler-ship, you can give whatever direction you wish on matters of law and state. Is there any saying or written evidence of a woman having legislated a law?" [68] What is significant to note here is how Khān, through the tale of lion and human, demonstrates a politics of representation in which the power of those who control political and social institutions is not limited to rule of law but influences the definition and representation of marginalized or powerless members of society. Like the lion looking at the painting or the image of Satan in the court of Nawshirwan, they are defined by others and lack the agency to represent themselves in their complexity.

[68] Ibid., 65.

Regarding Aqīl-un-nissā's charge of misrepresentation and cruelty of male kings, Mardān-i Hind Khān claims objectivity saying that:

> Things were expressed in the same way that they happened. Thus when the ancient sages of India and China learnt of the unbecoming qualities of women, they judged them incapable of state management and deprived them of kinship and wherever the power of governance was given to them, the consequences were disastrous. [69]

Citing afterwards the cruelty of Queen Mary I of England along with Queen Mary of Scots, he says that "it is well known that they hated the Protestants and illegally executed thousands of Protestant priests and scholars." In addition to Queen Mary I of England, Mardān-i Hind Khān also mentions Queen Isabella of Spain as an example of a cruel ruler and says that the understanding that the people of India have about women is correct. [70]

In response to Mardān-i Hind Khān, Aqīl-un-nissā engages in the same mode of reasoning mentioning historical figures of the Muslim world such as Chengiz Khan, Halaqu Khan, Nadir Shah and Allaudin Ghauri. Adopting a sarcastic tone, she says

> we know what a kind people Arab Beduins are, we know how kind Alexander was, we know how compassionately Dara did the work, we know how Rustom treated his own son, we know how Asphindiar treated his father and we also know how Emperor Alamgir, who also has a fatwa book, treated his own parents. [71]

Aqil-un-nissā's response concludes the disputations between Mardān-i Hind Khān and Aqil-un-nissā for the second day. Before closing, the judge says that "for the last two

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[69] Ibid., 66.
[70] Ibid., 68-9.
[71] Ibid., 71.

days, these two lawyers have brought out the defects of each other. But it is strange that none of them are free from defects. They are competing to score over each other and do not consider their own defects." [72] Following this pronouncement, the judge narrates a story of the goddess, Diana, who distributed two bags full of sins to each person. One of bags was full of that person's sins and the goddess commanded that they should keep that bag in front of them while the other bag full of the sins of others should be kept at the back. But, says the judge, "human beings despite this strict injunction violated her command. They kept the bag of their own sins at their back and hung the bag of sins of others in front of themselves. For this reason, human beings mention each other's defects but never remember their own."[73] Attempting to settle the discord between men and women, the judge wishes that the parties could have illustrated their cases on the bases of their virtues. [74]

At the Court of Humanity the next day, Mardān-i Hind Khān lists names of several men to emphasize greatness including kings like Nawsherwan, Akbar, Jamshed and Faridun, philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Galen, religious prophets including Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, and Sufi saints such as Shaikh Abdul Qādir Jilānī, Khwājā Muinuddīn Chishtī and Walī Shāh Qalandar.[75] He repeats his claim that women not only lack similar greatness but also possess bad traits and their insistence on equality and innocence was a case of an ordinary, average person claiming excellence and superiority. Aqīl-un-nissā, he says, should "tell her companions that they should throw out from their minds such a baseless idea and be content with what status men have

[72] Ibid., 73.
[73] Ibid., 74.
[74] Ibid., 74-5.
[75] ibid., 80.

accorded them" because education and training was appropriate for men who had been endowed with intelligence and reason by God, and that women should remain confined to the household and there was no need for education for them.[76]

In response to Mardān-i Hind Khān, Aqīl-un-nissā mentions female names including Queen Sheeba of Abyssinia, mathematician and philosopher Hypatia of Roman Egypt, Mary, Fatima and Sufi saints like Bībī Nūr and Rābia.[77] In addition to these women, Aqīl-un-nissā also narrates in detail the life of Dutch illustrator and scientist Maria Sibylla Merian. The biographical account begins with a brief mention of the life of her father, Matthaus Merian and moves on to describe her childhood in Nuremberg, her adult life in Amsterdam and her growing interest in zoology and entomology, the development of her skills in drawing and sketching, and her texts of illustrations along their translations in French and German.[78] The lengthy discussion of Maria Sibylla Merian's life is significant for two reasons. Firstly, by exalting a European historical figure, Khan introduces the possibility of female role models outside the Brahmanical or the Indo-Islamic tradition. This is a notable departure for reformist literature, which often praised and prescribed individuals located within their heritage. Indeed Mardān-i Hind Khān counters Aqīl-un-nissā's narrative with the retort that she mentioned mostly European women and ignored examples from India, where women lacked such distinction in the sciences and the arts.[79] The second distinct feature is that the nature of knowledge acquired by the educated role model is scientific and not related to housekeeping or ethical awareness. In both Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs* and Hālī's *Majalis-un-nissā,* the

[76] Ibid., 83.
[77] Ibid., 87-89; 117-120.
[78] Ibid., 92-104.
[79] Ibid., 124.

classical texts of women's education in late nineteenth century, educated women realized their potential within their familial relationships. The possibility of a female scientist as a figure of emulation in *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* presents another ideal that was also advocated in Urdu reformist literature of the nineteenth century.

After giving biographical examples, Aqil-un-nissā establishes the fundamental distinction between humans and animals to demonstrate commonality between men and women. For Khān, the foundational concepts for the distinguishing feature of humans are the qualities of *aql* (reason) and *ilm* (knowledge). The ability to distinguish good from bad is *aql* (reasoning) and is based on the choice of each person. Along with *aql,* writes Khān, "God has provided humans with several other qualities which clearly indicates that they have been born for multiple definitions."[80] The first quality is that men "think justly and in every matter, through the use of reason, debate with discretion, reflection and comprehension, separate falsehood from truth and differentiate between poison and medicine, between loss and benefit, between good and evil." [81] The second human trait includes a warning against laziness where humans "hope for the acquisition of every quality through effort and fulfill diligently the necessities of everyday life."[82] The third distinctive mark of a human being is to help others with "compassion, consideration and reflection." [83] These three qualities including reasoned judgment, hard work and compassionate service lead to knowledge. Summing up the argument, Khān defines human as:

[80] Ibid., 158
[81] ibid., 158-9.
[82] Ibid., 159.
[83] Ibid., 160.

> The human being by himself is a mere delicate and weak entity full of errors and forgetfulness but God, all-powerful and merciful with his grace and unlimited special benevolence decorated him with the jewel of reason and speech. And that jewel of reasoning gets polished and sparkled with knowledge. By endowing him with these qualities, God has entrusted him the position of his *khalifā* (deputyship) and has honored him with the title of '*ashraf-al makhluqat*' (noblest of the creatures) and has made him *shāhanshāh-i ālam* (Emperor of the World) [84]

Following this philosophical discussion, Khān asks, "now that we have established a definition of human, know the limit of knowledge and the praise of reason and know that both men and women are humans, the issue then becomes, why are women deprived of education." [85] Because of such deprivation, Aqīl-un-nissā argues that the jewel becomes blunted and loses its shine and worth. She then mentions the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad enjoining every Muslim, man or woman to acquire knowledge and insists that "you all know the meaning of *farz* (duty) and you are preventing them from fulfilling their duty. Fear God and do whatever is the duty in your religion." [86] Calling acquisition of knowledge and teaching of knowledge as the duty and command of God, Aqīl-un-nissā warns that those who do not follow these injunctions are oppressive and ignorant, and that the case for women' s education had been made both on worldly and religious grounds.[87] With this reasoning, Aqīl-un-nissā closes her argument and the judge asks Mardān-i Hind Khān to speak. In his closing, Mardān-i Hind Khān gracefully accepts defeat against Aqīl-un-nissā's argument and says that "we should be thankful to Aqīl- un-

[84] Ibid., 163.
[85] Ibid., 163-64.
[86] Ibid., 167.
[87] Ibid., 168, 169.

nissā Begum that she brought to notice big defects due to which we were leading a sinful life. And besides religious loss, we have also suffered impairments in relations of the world." [88] He further adds that "without doubt, education of women is a duty, without doubt, there is no difference in rank between men and women. Women have been endowed from God with the same reasoning, knowledge, understanding and reflection as men. "[89]

After Mardān-i Hind Khān's acceptance of Aqīl-un-nissā's views, jurist proceeds to give his judgment. Khān here inserts another biographical account, that of Laura Bridgman, through the voice of the jurist before giving his final judgment. Born in Hanover, Laura Bridgman lost her eyesight and hearing at the age of two. Despite this disability, she learnt how to read and write and made significant contributions to the study of deaf-blind persons. Khān describes movingly her frail health in infancy, the loss of her critical faculties and her difficulty in adjustment, her parents immigration to United States and her training in Boston where she learnt to recognize her surroundings and received an education gradually acquiring fame for her achievement. The jurist then endorses Aqīl-un-nissā saying that "the same thing that Aqīl-un-nissā mentioned as *aql* helped her to make life easier and facilitated her living."[90] He then asks, "now look, if the blind, deaf and dumb can achieve such things, then in our country, how can you think that education would prove useless for girls that are well?" [91] Ending his judgment, he argues that

[88] Ibid., 189.
[89] 189-90.
[90] Ibid., 196.
[91] Ibid., 225.

> it has become established clearly in the Court of Humanity after a lot of research and investigation that both men and women are human beings in all respects, that none of them is superior to the other, that both have same stature, a healthy reasoning capacity from God and for both *ilm* is necessary for their *aql*. [92]

Reprimanding those opposed to women's education, he also adds

> This Court of Humanity proclaims that whosoever prevents women from acquiring education will suffer from damages both in this world and life hereafter. He will be unmatched in his stupidity and his name should be removed from the list of human beings. [93]

The judgment of the Court of Humanity closes the major part of Khān's argument in defense of women's education. The last few pages of the text are contained in a section called *Sirāj-ul Aql* (Lamp of Reason). *Sirāj-ul Aql* is described as "report of the welfare seekers of the women of India whose chief patron is William Muir and principal assistant is Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān." The report claims to be a description of a meeting of a women's association whose chief is Aqīl-un-nissā and is made of up five other women named Najm-un-nissā, Farkhondāh Begum, Hamīd-un-nissā Begum, Satwanti Rani and Zīnat-un-nissā Begum. [94] At the beginning of the meeting, Aqīl-un-nissā describes the purpose of the association:

[92] Ibid., 234
[93] ibid., 235
[94] ibid., 248.

> The purpose of establishing this *anjuman* is that through this organization, we should extend benefits to our gender and compatriots… bravery and unity are wonderful phenomena. If you act fearlessly, you give strength to unity. [95]

What follows in the meeting are commentaries by its members on the nature of knowledge. Aqīl-un-nissā's talk focuses on the development of language giving a history of the pictograph and hieroglyphic writing in Egypt, the advent of the alphabet, the logic of grammar and the use of vowels along with the Biblical legend of the Babel's tower and Noah's flood. [96] She also discusses the use of stone and papyrus for writing and the invention of paper. [97] After Aqīl-un-nissā's comments, Satwanti Rani mentions the division of knowledge into mathematics, philosophy, the biological and the physical sciences. She gives brief summaries about algebra, algorithm and arithmetic in mathematics, about physical phenomena such as heat, electricity, magnetism, optics and finally a note on life sciences such as anatomy, zoology and medicine. She concludes herself with a mention of ethics. [98] Zīnat- un-nissā also continues the emphasis on science commenting on the laws of gravity, astronomy, solar system, Newton and the Archimedes principle. In addition to these phenomena, she also mentions William Jones, the establishment of Royal Asiatic Society and the learning of languages.[99] The extensive space given to scientific knowledge in the speeches of different female

[95] Ibid., 249.
[96] Ibid., 250-55.
[97] Ibid., 255-57
[98] ibid., 260-63.
[99] Ibid., 263-78.

characters illustrates Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān's consecration of science and its particular novelty in explaining the material world.[100]

Summarizing *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Sirāj-ul Aql,* we can say that Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān adds two distinct characteristics to the cause of women's education. Firstly, he argues it as an issue of justice and secondly, he aggressively integrates secular knowledge including political history, individual biographies and sciences into the curriculum of women's education. Despite the progressive leanings of the text, there are restrictions to certain kinds of knowledge and argument about gender equality is qualified within a framework of hierarchy. Like Nazīr Ahmad, Khān too believed that literature and poetry contained the risk of improper conduct and could become destructive. But he also ambiguously added that this "knowledge itself is not bad but people make it bad."[101] Also, after the Court of Humanity gives its radical verdict, the judge notes that when one includes both women and men in the category of human where neither of them is superior, it does not mean that husbands do not have supremacy over their wives. Explaining himself, he says:

> there are differences of grades in worldly management but in these different grades, there is a essence which is the same and because of this similarity, a king could become poor but the poor could also become king. In the same way, the husband has superiority over the wife and the parents have superiority over the children,

[100] Wazir Ali Khan shares this sentiment with other reformers such as Sayyid Ahmed Khan and his work on *natural theology.*
[101] Ibid., 183.

which is temporal not spiritual. Nobody should misunderstand what this Court of Humanity intends. [102]

According to Wazir Ali Khan, it is the 'spiritual' qualities that make men and women similar as humans and not the affairs of the world.

Following this analysis of *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat,* we shift our attention to the second text, *Favāid-un-nissā* by Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī. The text was first sent for evaluation to the Department of Education on 31 October 1871 in response to a letter to the author from William Muir. [103] Published for the first time in 1871, it ran into its fourth edition in 1891 when it was printed from Nawal Kishore Press. The main text is divided into ten chapters including themes like elaboration of the word '*aurat,'* benefits of one *nikāh* and the ordeals of more than one, benefits of imparting skill, knowledge and education to women, consequences of abandoning the inculcation of training, knowledge and skill to women, skills that are necessary for women, sciences forbidden for women, the kinds of books women must read and the ones they should avoid, the rights of women that men should fulfill and finally the practice of good living with women. In his preface, Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī (Bilgrāmī from here) refers to another of his texts, *Mūfīd-un-nisvān* (Benefits for Women) written earlier which also dealt with the issue of women's education. He writes that *Mūfīd-un-nisvān* tackled the problem of polygyny and advocated women's education largely within the framework of Islam and through the application of Qurānic injunctions.[104] While *Mūfīd-un-nisvān* was written for Muslims, *Favāid-un-nissā,* says Bilgrāmī, is meant for readers of all religious persuasions and

[102] Ibid., 240.
[103] Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī, *Favāid-un-nissā* (Kanpur: Nawal Kishore Press, 1892), 1.
[104] Ibid., 2.

advocates female education for all groups. Mentioning the difficulties of identifying a universal language for writing, he says that different groups such as elites, women, shopkeepers and ordinary commoners use separate languages for communication. In the absence of a standardized idiom, he had decided to write the text in simple Hindi[105] because it was meant for women and girls even though he was well equipped to write in ornate Urdu involving Arabic and Persian idioms. [106]

In his introduction to the text, Bilgrāmī argues that "in the eyes of Allah, women have superiority, honor and preference over all men and all angels in their virtues and in their entitlement for the fortunes of this world and the world hereafter."[107] Bilgrāmī cites two beliefs from the Islamic tradition to establish that men are superior to angels and that women in turn are superior to men. In the first story, all the angels were commanded by Allah to prostrate themselves before Adam indicating the supremacy of man over angels. The second idea about the supremacy of women over men comes from the Qurānic story of Harut and Marut. In referring to this belief, Bilgrāmī assumes that his readers have sufficient theological knowledge and only mentions that 'bad' women, Zohra and Mushtari, were punished by God to become the stars while the angels Harut and Marut are still hanging in the well of Babylon. [108] According to Muslim belief, when the angels witnessed the evil doings of mankind, they complained against them to God. Instead of attending to their complaint, God said that if they had been placed on earth like the

[105] The use of the word 'Hindi' instead of 'Urdu' by Bilgrāmī is revealing and indicates that the common North Indian Hindi-Urdu lingua franca was often referred to as Hindi and writing in Perso-Arabic script did not imply Urdu.
[106] Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī, *Favāid-un-nissā* (Kanpur: Nawal Kishore Press, 1892), 3-4.
[107] Ibid., 6.
[108] Ibid., 8.

humans, they would also have behaved in the same way. Following this rebuttal, the angels selected Harut and Marut amongst them to live on earth. To make sure that they live like humans, God breathed the same desires and weaknesses into Harut and Marut as he had into mankind. While living on earth as married men, Harut and Marut encounter a beautiful woman named Zohra and they both seek her. But Zohra shows little interest and says that she would accept their proposal only if they worshipped like her, killed someone or drank wine. Despite this condition, they have an affair with Zohra and commit adultery. In this encounter with Harut and Marut, Zohra learns from them the secret of ascending to the heavens. God thus changes Zohra into a star while the angels are punished and banished to hang inside the well of Babylon.

From both these stories, Bilgrāmī argues that while men are higher than angels, even the worst amongst women, Zohra, who lured Harut and Marut into wrongful ways, is superior to men because she determined the mystery of angels, was raised to the skies and acquired the glory of a star. Bilgrāmī says that because angels prostrated only to Adam and not a woman, people assume that women have little value in God's creation and men have written several books on their shortcomings highlighting the inferiority of women. For Bilgrāmī, "they can write whatever they like because they have pen in their control."[109]

The portrayal of women in the Qurān and Hadith as beings deficient in reason, according to Bilgrāmī, is based on "apparent meaning" and people haven't paid proper attention to this in the past. [110] Amongst the most popular beliefs is that fidelity cannot be expected from a woman. What men have confused for fidelity, argues Bilgrāmī, is

[109] Ibid., 9.
[110] Ibid., 11.

actually greater adaptivity of women. A girl who grows with her parents is expected one day to leave their house and her close relatives, even her homeland and live amidst strangers and unfamiliar people for the remainder of her life. If women could not adjust to changing situations, Bilgrāmī says, they would not be able to live their life. [111] Thus as a reward for his adaptability, "all the wealth, fortune, beauty, comfort and luxury of the world that have been created by Allah are for women whereas the tasks of effort, ardor, labor and earning are for men."[112] Through a concept of divine sanction and grace, Bilgrāmī constructs notions of gendered subjectivity involving concepts of masculinity and femininity. Women are suited for intellectual or familial tasks whereas men are more inclined towards occupations of labor and physicality.

Bilgrāmī ends his introduction with a strong exaltation of Queen Victoria as proof of the efficiency of a woman ruler. Citing the Qurānic story of Sulaiman (Soloman) and Bilqees (Sheeba) in Surah Al-Naml (The Ant), he says that when King Sulaiman heard of the greatness of the kingdom of Queen Sheeba but that they were worshippers of sun and not Allah, he sent her a letter. Upon receiving the letter, Queen Sheeba consulted with her advisers and said that whenever kings enter a town, they spoil it and make the most honorable amongst its people the lowest. [113] Connecting this to his own contemporary events particularly the revolt of 1857, Bilgrāmī says that even if there were several good officials posted throughout Hindustan in general and in Awadh in particular, the destruction caused by the change of administration was not Queen Victoria's fault but is in the general nature of war and invasion. Refuting criticism against the Queen, he adds

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[111] Ibid., 10.
[112] Ibid., 11.
[113] Ibid., 23. Also see *The Qur'an,* trans. M.H. Shakir, "Surah Al-Naml (The Ant)," (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an ,1997): 366-367.

that "even the Quran, as we have seen, says that it is difficult to ensure good management in the wake of revolutionary changes and it is important to note that everything is not in control of humans."[114] Calling Queen Victoria sympathetic and forgiving, he mentions the pardon given to Indian soldiers who had committed atrocities not only against their enemies but also against innocent women and children. "Do you think such remarkable forgiveness could have come from a man," asks Bilgrāmī and argues further that it is a "manifestation of special divine mercy which manifested itself in the personality of a woman." [115] Following this praise of Queen Victoria, Bilgrāmī mentions various colonial developments in particular the control of animosities between communities accompanied by the weakening of civil strife in Lucknow and the advocacy of education, sciences and the arts especially for women as noteworthy achievements. Throughout the country, he says, in "each region, each city, each village, each *qasba,* each lane and by-lane, actually along each house, you have schools, *madrasas* and college for education of each branch of science and art taking into view the susceptibilities of the religious sentiments and rules of living of each community." [116]

Bilgrāmī's adulation and admiration of Queen Victoria is not unique and was fairly common amongst Indian Muslim commentators of women's education. Arguing that women can be as capable as men in governance, Mumtāz Alī for instance called the rule of Queen Victoria wise and just. [117]

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[114] Ibid., 23.
[115] Ibid., 25.
[116] Ibid., 29.
[117] Gail Minault, *Gender, Language and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009), 41.

In the first chapter, Bilgrāmī explains the meaning of the word '*aurat'* to support veiling but reject immobility of women. 'Aurat' means hidden in Arabic but anything that is hidden, says Bilgrāmī, is not aurat. Citing Surah Al-Noor (The Light) from the Qurān, he says that the word 'aurat' is only employed for covering parts of the body and that women should cover their bodies with clothes and should not be bare in front of strangers but that this does not imply being restricted to the house. [118] For this reason, the word 'satr' is also used which means covering of something and 'satr-i aurat' is especially used for covering body parts. For men, this is from the waist to the knee joints and for women, it is from the neck to the feet. [119] The injunction to stay at home, on the other hand, says Bilgrāmī, is due to prestige. Furthermore, this isn't particularly true of women but also *sharīf* men for whom it is useless to meander around in the market. It is the commoners, the traders, craftsmen or the shopkeepers who go to the market. Interpreting purdah to mean only clothing, he says that the most important part of purdah are the woman's clothes or *libās.* According to the Qurān, the *libās* for a woman is a man and for a man is a woman.[120] Based on this notion of *libās*, the purdah of a man is the woman and of the woman is the man, A married woman, therefore, is already in *libās* and is *'zan-i muhsana,'* that is, someone firmly seated in a fort. A married woman therefore doesn't need to stay in the house like a prisoner. Moreover, Bilgrāmī says that locking up someone inside the home has a reverse effect because then they will be tempted to leave.

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[118] Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī, *Favāid-un-nissā* (Kanpur: Nawal Kishore Press, 1892), 36. Also see *The Qur'an,* trans. M.H. Shakir, "Surah Al-Noor (The Light), Verse 31" (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an ,1997): 338.

[119] Ibid., 36

[120] Ibid., 38. *The Qur'an,* trans. M.H. Shakir, "Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow), Verse 187" (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an ,1997): 25.

But if they are not coerced, they will stay inside the house on their own will. [121] Thus under conditions in which women is forced to stay inside the house while men can go out, the purdah of both men and women is broken. [122]

Following his explanation of 'aurat' and his interpretation of *libās*, Bilgrāmī proceeds to discuss the virtues of one *nikāh* and the vices of more than one *nikāh.* Citing the first Qurānic verse from the chapter on women, Bilgrāmī says that God created a pair from the soul of a single being. Thus Eve was made from the same source as Adam and that everything God gave birth to was from a pair. But this pair is established only when there is one man and one woman. [123] It is surprising, says Bilgrāmī, that humans who are endowed with so much reason and culture cannot understand that creation emerged from a pair.

Bilgrāmī tackles the question of four wives in the Qurān through a re-interpretation of the Qurānic verse by drawing a difference between two kinds of verses in the Qurān. According to Bilgrāmī, there are two categories of Qurānic verses: '*muhakamāt'* and *'mutashabiahat.' Muhakamāt* are those verses which have a clear injunction or prohibition and in which there is no question of twist or interpretation. For instance, Abraham in his dream was commanded to sacrifice his son. But other dreams need interpretation. Pharaoh, for example, saw an emaciated cow eating the fat cow and the dry bushes consuming the wet bushes. To understand this, he went to Joseph who interpreted it and said that it means that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine. The '*mutashabiahat*' verses thus are open to interpretation and only

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[121] Ibid., 39.
[122] Ibid., 40-1.
[123] Ibid., 42. *The Qur'an,* trans. M.H. Shakir, "Surah Al-Nissa (The Women), Verse 1" (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an ,1997): 69.

God knows their exact meaning. Bilgrāmī argues that in these verses, selfish people draw meaning that suits their behavior and use it to rationalize their behavior. The verse on multiple marriages is not *muhakamāt*, says Bilgrāmī, because it does not say you can marry up to four. [124] It could also mean 'two plus two, three plus three and four plus four,' which adds upto eighteen. Therefore a mullah told Emperor Akbar that he could marry up to eighteen. But some people also read only four in it, which is also the convention. Bilgrāmī says that his interpretation of the verse is neither one and that the meaning of a verse should be such that it doesn't violate a wise way of living causing breach of solitude and peace. Furthermore, he says, nowhere is it clear that you could have another wife while your first wife is alive. Therefore, it may very well mean that one could have a second wife after the first one dies and then a third wife after the second wife's death.[125] Bilgrāmī argues that justice to this verse can only be done by a prophet and not by a human being. But in the case of Abraham and his wives Sara and Hajra, that was also difficult. Thus, if the condition for justice cannot be fulfilled, the permission is nullified.[126]

Elaborating his case against polygyny, Bilgrāmī says that women weren't created only for the fulfillment of bodily desires. God has created women and a pair for bliss, friendship and to live in grace. The love between man and a woman is a manifestation of God's mercy. To abandon this for carnal desire is to live like a prostitute in which only one type of pleasure is fulfilled. Moreover, a pair becomes an act of bliss for the man only if the woman also derives pleasure and bliss form the relationship. This mutuality

[124] Ibid., 45.
[125] Ibid., 46.
[126] Ibid., 47.

isn't possible if the woman is disturbed. One cannot assume that God's creation of pair be a relief for a man if the woman is suffering. In such situation, women will resort to sorcery and magic. Out of envy, she too would try to damage the husband. Family life in such societies, argues Bilgrāmī, becomes fraught, miserable and disturbed.[127]

Employing a *dastan*-like story from his memory to strengthen his argument, Bilgrāmī narrates a tale of a thief and a trader with two wives. Once upon a time, two thieves entered a trader's house to steal and to their surprise, witnessed that the trader was suspended between two floors of the house where the two wives in each floor were pulling him apart, one from his head and the other from his legs. [128] The trader was pleading to both wives to let him go. Meanwhile the thieves lost sight of rummaging through the house and started staring at the drama in the house. Taking advantage of the situation, one thief fled while the other continued to look forgetfully and was later arrested by the police. Despite repeated threats from the police, the thief refused to reveal any information. Finally, the trader warned that if the thief does not give the whereabouts and identity of the other thief, he would have to marry two wives. Unable to resist, the thief said that he would tell the truth if he is saved from the prospect of two wives. [129] Bilgrāmī poses the question to his readers about the relevance and wisdom of these stories. For Bilgrāmī, it means that love with more than one wife is difficult but in a monogamous union even the bad things would turn into qualities. [130] Furthermore, Bilgrāmī says that it has also been revealed that one dies the way one has lived and is resurrected also in the same way. Thus if the life has been one of love and happiness,

[127] Ibid., 52-3.
[128] Ibid., 55.
[129] Ibid., 56.
[130] Ibid., 57.

heaven too would be elation but a life of polygyny, on the other hand, would turn even heaven into hell. Thus "from the point of view of reason, tradition and experience, one can say that comfort can be acquired only through the 'pair.' [131]

Having commented on conjugality, Bilgrāmī shifts his focus to the question of education for women. Presenting a fundamental division of capacities between the sexes, he says that God made men for activities more suited for physical labor in which they are responsible for tasks like agriculture, tilling land and military combat whereas women have softer and more malleable qualities which allows them to be compatible with tasks of knowledge, skills and arts in which physicality is not a primary prerequisite. [132] This division lies in the commands Adam was given after his banishment from Paradise. Ousted from Paradise, Adam was given oxen by Gabriel and taught how to till and harvest the land while Eve wasn't taught these skills. But once the grain was produced, Adam wished to possess all of it but he was prohibited by God and instructed that he must first set aside the due he owed Eve, and only then he could own the grain. Thus, Eve was given preference over Adam. Out of this, "the rights of women", writes Bilgrāmī, "acquired precedence over those of men."[133] Connecting his argument against female seclusion to education, Bilgrāmī says that it is only the *ashraf* who believe that education opposes religion and is a violation of purdah. Education would provide women an opportunity to keep themselves busy in skills without which they would get pre-occupied with banal and bad thoughts and do nothing. [134] The skills and arts that suit the female temperament, according to Bilgrāmī, are those of reading and writing for which there are

[131] Ibid., 58.
[132] Ibid., 59.
[133] Ibid., 60.
[134] Ibid., 64.

repeated injunctions and commands in the Qurān and the Hadith. For Bilgrāmī, this greater propensity for reading is illustrated when women who are taught only a paragraph from the Qurān can offer the *namaz* and with those limited skills are able to recognize alphabets, write letters, read *marsīyas,* and even become *ustānīs.* Emphasizing the importance of knowledge, Bilgrāmī writes that the difference between a rational, speaking human and an animal is the capacity for knowledge and while both men and women are equally present to partake in this endeavor. This, says Bilgrāmī, has been established by tradition, reason and wisdom.

One of the most unique features of Bilgrāmī's discussion is that he utilizes the idea of women's education to critique dependence of women upon men through the prospect of female employment and connects their inability to earn a living to their subordination. He writes:

> in the story mentioned earlier in which Gabriel taught Adam cultivation, Adam was not able to use the corn harvest without marking out a separate share for Eve. Therefore, it became inevitable that women become subordinated, obedient and dependent upon men and because of this dependency and subordination, they encounter difficulties, miseries and subordination. There is no way of freedom for them and their access to livelihood in this world is contingent upon their dependency and obedience to men. [135]

What is unusual here is that Bilgrāmī employs the same story to construct two fundamentally different arguments. In his previous interpretation of the story, the separate share for Eve implied Adam's obligations to Eve and Eve's precedence over

[135] Ibid., 66.

Adam's use of his harvest. On the other hand, in the second interpretation a few pages later, we note that Eve receiving grain from Adam insinuates that Eve cannot harvest the grain herself and wasn't taught these skills by Gabriel leaving her dependent, subordinated to and obedient upon Adam. Thus the source of both Eve's precedence over Adam and her subordination to Adam are the same. Bilgrāmī doesn't attempt to resolve this contradiction nor is it clear in the text if he views this conflict as a problem. The point of significance is that the primacy of financial independence of women is crucial in securing their freedom from subordination to men and this economic autonomy can only be attained through the acquisition of skills and education. Continuing his argument further, Bilgrāmī extends his understanding to the condition of widows in the country:

> in particular in this country, in India, women after the death of their husbands do not have a second marriage. In such circumstances where widows in India are not endowed with any means, skill or occupation to earn their livelihood and the second marriage is disparaged, one can imagine their plight. [136]

Reason therefore demands, says Bilgrāmī, that one provide knowledge and skills to women so that the shameful and untoward conditions of widows can be averted. He also adds that some women in Awadh became so skilled that their husbands became dependent upon them. These women reached mansions of Nawabs and started writing letters, became teachers, read *marsīyas*, books and acquired respectable titles.[137] The ability to earn a livelihood and the instrumentality of skills, says Bilgrāmī, leads to avoidance of illegal offenses because women need to live comfortably, and training and skills allows them to avoid temptations, thereby protecting their honor. He also cites Al-

[136] Ibid., 66.
[137] Ibid., 67.

Ghazali's *Kimeya-Sadat* saying that "if men become a hindrance, then they would be committing a sin and in those circumstances, women should not listen to men and make their own efforts towards education."[138]

In his discussion, Bilgrāmī connects his concept of female independence to a harmonious social order. He argues that while the benefits of male independence that are derived from earning a livelihood are not open to question, the advantages of female autonomy arising out of financial independence enable women to assist and help men and they both complement each other to create a balanced society.

Bilgrāmī also differentiates between the training acquired to earn a livelihood and knowledge as a virtue. Without knowledge, a human being can't recognize God. Skills and artisanship thus enable us to earn a livelihood but to live a good life and appreciate divinity, there is a need for learning of higher sciences so that the human heart is secured from the influence of devil (*shaitan*) and selfishness (*nisf*). [139] To explain the significance of knowledge as a virtue, Bilgrāmī presents a fable. A man once saw a gathering of devils in which the Head Devil sat on a high embankment and asked other subordinate devils what they had done. The Head Devil would give the greatest rewards to the one who had influenced humans to commit the greatest evil. Each one gleefully expressed their achievements. One mentioned that he got someone to steal, another that he got one to murder while others mentioned how they influenced people towards sinfulness, abandonment of prayer, addiction to alcohol, deception, lies, duplicity and fraud. The Head Devil heard all of them attentively but remained unimpressed and did not give rewards to anyone. He then noticed one devil, who had not disclosed his achievements,

[138] Ibid., 69.
[139] Ibid., 76.

sitting quietly. When the Head Devil requested him to speak, he hesitated saying that he had nothing exceptional to add and it was irrelevant in front of the evils already mentioned. The Head Devil nevertheless insisted that he talk for the sake of informing him. With diffidence, he said that all he did was that he met a young boy who regularly attended his lessons and he immersed him so much in play that he withdrew him from his lessons. Upon hearing this, the Head Devil got so elated and excited that he showered his subordinate devil with all the wealth possible. Envious of this response, other devils asked why they weren't rewarded for their spectacular triumphs of evil while a minor disturbance in school attendance should get so much prestige and bounty. The Head Devil responded that they had all engaged in malignant actions but their victims eventually learnt to see and purged sickness from their self while the last devil by terminating the boy's education had turned the boy entirely in their control no matter how pious, ascetic and devotional the boy eventually becomes. [140] Extracting his own argument from the parable, Bilgrāmī writes

> those who think that teaching secluded women reading and writing and passing the secret of pen in their hands is antithetical to purdah and restraint, who give room to the opposition to education in the heart and who think that this vice is actually a virtue, this is the only definition of selfishness (*nisf*) and devil (*shaitan).* [141]

Bilgrāmī repeats the story of Adam's supremacy over the angels to establish the significance of knowledge. He also adds the tale of King Soloman's adviser, Asif Barkhiya, whose intelligence and education is reputed to have enabled King Soloman to

[140] Ibid., 76-78.
[141] Ibid., 78.

unite his throne with that of Queen Sheeba with great political efficiency.[142] Maintaining a religious perspective on the question of education, Bilgrāmī argues that the real purpose of knowledge is recognition of divinity and presents the Sufi view of knowledge dividing the world into mystical realm, realm of omnipotence, realm of angels and finally the realm of human affairs.

A distinct feature of Bilgrāmī's argument is that he recognizes literacy not only as a precondition for education but also different from it. Terms like *ilm* are repeatedly employed to refer to the advantages of education and its subsequent connection to ethics but the ability to read and write is the skill of *harfshanāsī.* The ability of *harfshanāsī* produces its own joys of reading. Even with a little literacy, says Bilgrāmī, the advantages are obvious for all to see for when one gets immersed in books and joyously travels through them, one reaches another world. While skills and training enable us to earn, the lover of reading thinks that he has all the wealth of the world even if he doesn't work. Such people acquire great honor and respect in society. The company of such a person, says Bilgrāmī, is even better than prayer and is instructed in both the Qurān and the Hadith.[143]

Like Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān, Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī also believed that certain texts in particular stories of romance and love should not be read. He upholds Al-Ghazali's *Kimeya Sa'dat* as an ideal text for ethical instruction and instrumental in generating a healthy mind and good life. He also gives examples of romance literature, which should be excluded from reading such as *Fasāna-i Ajaib, Qissa Gul Baqaoli, Qissa Chahār Dervish.* Bilgrāmī specifically points out that the reading of these texts

[142] Ibid., 81.
[143] Ibid., 75.

should be regulated and both men and women ought to avoid them.[144] Bilgrāmī acknowledges the improvement in language particularly prose, recitation and vocabulary that would result from reading such literature but insists that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages and that one should read books on ethics, philosophy and religion.[145]

Bilgrāmī also does not limit his argument to expelling these books from the reading life. If stories about love are not to be engaged with, then what concept of love should one aspire to in life? Bringing his Sufi learning into focus, he argues that it makes little sense to desire love that displaced Adam from Paradise and the only love worth striving for is the one that is felt from renouncing of grain in an empty stomach, which leads towards the highest level of knowledge where 'true love' or *ishq-i haqīqī* is felt. [146]

According to Bilgrāmī, the crucial factors in implementing education are language of instruction and the schedule of learning. The easiest language one can acquire literacy in is that of conversation. It thus makes sense that young girls begin to acquire skills of reading and writing in Urdu. Bilgrāmī discusses briefly the simplification of writing prose and the use of vernacular language in education. He says that in earlier writing styles, people were more engaged in rhetorical devices and the prose was hyperbolic. But with the impact of British rule, one can educate oneself in the language they speak.[147] Several texts of Arabic and Persian are now available in Urdu, says Bilgrāmī, and the urgency to learn these languages in order to get educated has declined. [148] If someone still has the time and is willing to work hard at a language, Bilgrāmī suggests that they do

[144] Ibid., 84.
[145] Ibid., 154-55.
[146] Ibid, 86.
[147] Ibid., 132.
[148] Ibid., 134.

English in the same way they did Persian to derive the advantages from the earlier language of authorities and rulers. [149] To get employment, it is more important for men to learn Urdu and English instead of Arabic and Persian. Insisting that there are good books also available in English, Bilgrāmī says that one shouldn't think that they are only available in Persian and Arabic.

The path of education doesn't end with literacy but begins with it. Following literacy is the acquisition of knowledge and its proper understanding after which one is to gain perception into reason and consciousness. This process requires years of practice and hard work but young girls are unable to give time because they are married early and then get busy in raising a family. The solution, Bilgrāmī writes, is to postpone marriage and start the education of girls from the age of five where they learn how to read and write. [150] An educated woman, says Bilgrāmī, won't do *zāhirī* (apparent) purdah but also *bātinī* (spiritual) purdah. A woman who has not received the advantages of literacy will not only reduce her worth but also suffer the risk of dependency on men and poor character development. [151] Excessive obedience and dependence of women is due to their ignorance and once they acquire skill and knowledge, they will be not be trapped by their subordination. Urging empathy from his readers, Bilgrāmī again enjoins them to imagine the circumstances of a woman who has become a widow or is divorced, living without an education and is unable to remarry.[152] If one receives an education, the fire that destroys

[149] Ibid., 135.
[150] Ibid., 91.
[151] Ibid., 95, 96.
[152] Ibid., 100, 101.

us will be extinguished and we will be saved. Education, according to Bilgrāmī, thus becomes prerogative for everyone. [153]

Conclusion

Having analyzed Muhammad Vazīr Alī Khān's *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī's *Favāid-un-nissā,* we can relate these texts to those of other prominent reformers and locate them in the historiography on women's education and Muslim social reform. Like Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs,* Hālī's *Majalis-un-nissā* and Ashraf Alī Thānavī's *Bihishtī Zevar,* they are texts in cultural and social transformation that highlight the importance of women as repositories of knowledge, education and virtue. Both Khān and Bilgrāmī view education as enabling ability of judgment, a prerogative that makes us human. Both also employ stories, legends and reasoning from the rich religious tradition of Biblical-Quranic heritage and a vibrant pre-modern ethical education. They are also similar in rejecting certain kinds of knowledge especially literature on love, romance and poetry as dangerous for society. But there are significant differences from other reformers in how the argument is constructed and what specifically is highlighted or ignored. First, unlike Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī, they de-link the connections between domesticity and women's education indicating that the 'professionalization of housewife' is only one of the trajectories in social reform. There is little discussion in either texts on women's duties within the household and their role in maintaining the family. It would be farfetched to argue that these ideas are completely excluded but they are subordinated to philosophical arguments about the necessity of education in becoming human. In their weak emphasis on domesticity, these texts share

[153] Ibid., 98.

more with Mumtāz Alī's *Huqūq-i Nisvān* than with Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs* and Hālī's *Majalis-un-nissā.* The second point of importance is the role of religion in these texts. *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* is unique in combing old religious legends and medieval Islamic philosophy with scientific knowledge and secular history, sometimes European, in its argumentation. *Favāid-un-nissā,* on the other hand, is deeply religious with Bilgrāmī citing extensively from the Qurān. Like Thānavī in *Bihistī Zevar,* Bilgrāmī argued that men and women are endowed with the same *aql* (reason), which must be employed to defeat *nafs* (selfishness).[154] But in *Bihishtī Zevar, "*women are meant to be socially subordinate to men and to adhere to the *sharia* standard of seclusion." [155] In *Favāid-un-nissā,* Bilgrāmī constructs an argument against domestic seclusion and immobility through a re-interpretation of Qurānic verses opening the possibility of female employment. More importantly he views education as a means to achieve financial independence that could end the subordination and dependency of women on men within the social order.

One of the most important features of *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Favāid-un-nissā* is the critical context of colonialism marked by their reference to William Muir. With his long career in imperial service, William Muir had established contacts with Indian officials and scholars debating issues of religion and education. [156] From 1868 onwards, he was the Lieutenant-Governor of North Western Provinces and placed strong emphasis on teaching in the vernaculars with greater weight on 'original' texts instead of translated

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[154] Barbara Metcalf, trans., *Perfecting Women: Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānāvī's Bihishtī Zewar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 8.
[155] Ibid., 9.
[156] Avril Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education and Empire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 100-126.

books. [157] As mentioned earlier, amongst several submissions to the office of William Muir were also *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Favāid-un-nissā,* which were published after government announced that books on education would be rewarded. But these texts were rejected or overlooked by William Muir and therefore could not establish any kind of influence on social reform.

What could be the possible reasons for their disappearance? The most obvious one could be that they could never acquire the status of textbooks and therefore lacked institutional or governmental support in their dissemination. But this doesn't solve the problem of their exclusion or disappearance. One can only conjecture a few explanations here. First, the educational projects of William Muir were not just exercises in 'moral improvement' meant for North Indians but also re-shaped the vernacular language especially Urdu. *Sirāj-ul Hidāyat* and *Favāid-un-nissā* are difficult to read because they are written in pre-modern Urdu and lack even proper punctuation marks of full stops and commas within a sentence. Such language could not have aspired to become instructional and would be excluded from books of general education. Secondly, they aren't easily 'instructional' or 'didactic' in their structure but are also commentaries of philosophical reasoning which is ideally suited for an adult audience. A related feature here could be that, unlike Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī, they do not emphasize explicitly that the aim of education is to better acquire the skills of domesticity and thus propose an ambiguous picture of gender roles.

As mentioned before, the ideas of Muhammad VazĪr AlĪ Khān and Muhammad Zahīr Bilgrāmī are closer to Mumtāz Alī, and their foundational argument for women's

[157] ibid., 228.

education doesn't rest on domesticity. What is interesting to note is that once conjugality became an arena for intervention by reformers and as the movement for women's education acquired strength, the issue of women's education became so intimately interwoven with proper familial roles that it was never separated or made fully autonomous. As I illustrate in the thesis, this interconnectivity was not accidental because family could only be 'reformed' through education. Thus the story of familial transformation amongst Muslims in colonial India is also at the same time a narrative about the changing nature of the debate on modern education. It is to this narrative that we should now turn.

Chapter 2: The Domestication of Intimacy

Movements of social reform amongst Indian Muslims in the late nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the key issues of women's education and conjugality, which informed debates about gender and the role of women in society. While reformers like Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī discussed domesticity under the broad rubric of women's education, there were also writers who treated conjugality autonomously. This chapter will highlight the discourse on conjugality as a distinct topic of public conversation and discuss how it appeared independently as a question in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Attention to marriage practices in South Asian historiography is usually centered on the study of colonial social reforms particularly colonial legislation involving the ban on the Hindu practice of *sati* or widow burning in 1829, the campaign for the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856 and the controversy surrounding Age of Consent Bill of 1891. One of the central and distinctly colonial features in these campaigns for reformist legislation, as demonstrated by several historians, was textual hegemony and the preponderance of scripture over custom. Overlooking numerous diverse traditions of law and conduct applicable to caste, tribe, lineage or even a family group, the process of codification of Hindu laws on *sati* and widow remarriage in early and mid nineteenth century involved a gradual erosion of myriad rituals and customs in marriages in favor of a judicial preference for 'Hindu law' that could be found in religious texts. Lata Mani has argued that women themselves were marginal to the debates on *sati* but instead were the grounds on which scripture was subjected to rigorous scrutiny through liberal,

conservative and colonial interpretations and came to be equated with 'tradition.' [158] Lucy Caroll similarly has demonstrated that in most questions of personal legal status such as remarriage or property rights for women, there was a proclivity amongst judges to conform to the tenets of orthodox Hinduism established through texts and to ignore local systems of customary laws.[159]

While the debates on *sati* and widow remarriage brought to the fore questions about the relationship between ritual and law, the late nineteenth century in colonial India witnessed intense controversy over conjugality in the Age of Consent bill of 1891 revealing the dynamics of nationalist politics. The Age of Consent bill introduced in the Legislative Council raised the age of consent for sexual intercourse for girls from ten to twelve. The Bill aimed to prevent premature consummation of child marriage and provoked massive opposition from Indians. In her analysis of the controversy in the state of Bengal, Tanika Sarkar identifies the dynamics involving the abandonment of liberal reformism in favor of Hindu cultural nationalism amongst the Bengali middle class at the turn of the nineteenth century. According to Sarkar, with the disempowerment of Indian men in the public arena of employment, business, and worldly matters under colonialism, there was a claim to a sense of sovereign selfhood and mastery in the homes giving force to the distinct political formation of revivalist Hindu nationalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The attempts at legislation to improve the conditions of women were construed as a threat to the order of Hindu patriarchy. Debates over women's rights

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[158] Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati Colonial India, " in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History,* ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 119.

[159] Lucy Carroll, "Law, Custom and Statutory Social Reform: The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856" in *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader,* ed. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 93.

including age of consent of marriage, widow remarriage and so forth became a battle between universal liberal rights of the individual versus the particular communitarian rights of a politically emasculated and threatened social community of upper caste Hindus.[160]

Mrinalini Sinha has investigated the agitation against the bill within the framework of 'colonial masculinity.' Sinha argues that for the opponents of the bill, the domestic space had to be preserved as the autonomous space for 'native masculinity' and any kind of colonial state intervention was seen as a violation of 'native masculinity' in particular, and Hindu religious beliefs in general. This stance of opposition however, Sinha contends, paradoxically brought nationalists into closer alliance with colonial politics since the colonial authorities were committed to a policy of ostensible non-interference in the social and religious affairs of Indians and the anti-bill protests converged with the 'non-interference' code of colonial policy.[161]

Questions of sexuality, conjugality and gender relations thus had become contested issues by late nineteenth century and evoked intensely polarizing responses. Not surprisingly, Muslims too addressed similar concerns in their writings and contributed to the larger debate on family and social reform in colonial India. Examining the nature of argument in four texts including Muhammad Abdulqādir's *Islāh-i Hayāt* (Reform of Life), Muhammad-un-nissā's *Hidāyat-un-nissā, Rafīq-i Arūs* (Advice for Women), Muhammadī Begum's *Rafīq-i Arūs* (The Bride's Companion) and Sayyid Alī Bilgrāmī's

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160 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 191-225.

161 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 141-45.

Falsafah-yi Izdivāj (Philosophy of Marriage), this chapter adds a set of non-legal sources authored by Muslims to the current historical understanding of conjugality in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Muhammad Abdulqādir's *Islāh-i Hayāt* (Reform of Life) was published in 1886 and is one of the earliest texts devoted exclusively to marital issues involving spouse selection, compatibility, marriageable age and love between husband and wife. During the same period, Muhammad-un-nissā wrote essays that focused on counsels for women on how to perform their duties of married life. Muhammad-un-nissā died in 1889 and her son, Sayyid Muhammad, who discovered her writings several years later in his pile of books, published them as *Hidāyat-un-nissā* (Advice for Women) in 1903.

By discussing *Islāh-i Hayāt* and *Hidāyat-un-nissā* together, this chapter aims to highlight key differences in the approach to conjugality between men and women in late nineteenth century. In order to substantiate the nature of arguments in these texts, I also analyze Muhammadī Begum's *Rafīq-i Arūs* (The Bride's Companion) written in 1901 along with Sayyid Alī Bilgrāmī's *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* (Philosophy of Marriage) published in 1909. Both *Rafīq-i Arūs* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* have important continuities with *Hidāyat-un-nissā* and *Islāh-i Hayāt* and illustrate the common set of themes that emerged in literature that specifically addressed marriage and family in late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The texts of *Islāh-i Hayāt, Hidāyat-un-nissā, Rafīq-i Arūs* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* reveal the changing understanding of conjugality amongst the Urdu-speaking Muslims of colonial India. They all can be said to belong to the genre of advice manuals, a form of writing that was aimed largely at *sharīf* elite Muslims, and intended to fashion individual

character through the dissemination of various kinds of information. In Urdu, the birth of the didactic novel in Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs* turned the novel into an advice genre, producing its several variants and imitations in twentieth century. More specifically, advice manuals became the ideal fertile ground amongst Muslims for conjugality to be taught, criticized and discussed. Muhammad Abdulqādir, Muhammad-un-nissā, Muhammadī Begum and Sayyid Alī Bilgrāmī continually stress the necessity of a happy life to be achieved through a harmonious home and the precise removal of problems arising out of discordant and quarrelsome relationships. Their differences, however, emphasize that there was little consensus on how this was to be accomplished.

Islāh-i Hayāt by Muhammad Abdulqādir (Abdulqādir) begins with a praise of God and Prophet Muhammad, and is composed of fourteen chapters devoted to issues of selection of spouse, appropriate marriageable age, love between husband and wife, 'improper' desire and a pure life, child-.rearing and women's health during pregnancy and nursing. Explaining his reasons for publishing *Islāh-i Hayāt,* Abdulqādir writes that that people have totally ignored the divine intent and greatness of conjugality and the "result is that people invest more thought into purchase of horses than in considering how they should select their spouses and how to consider rights of their children."[162] Ignoring their personal lives only brings quarrelling and a peaceful house becomes a miserable one leading to particular problems of "sinfulness and imbalance." It is only a matter of time before the children also get affected ruining family relations and destroying humanism.[163] Abdulqādir argues that this 'sinful and imbalanced life' has become especially dominant

[162] Muhammad Abdulqādir, *Islāh-i Hayāt* (1886), iii.

[163] Ibid., vi.

in his time to the extent that the problems of such a life aren't even considered flaws but are understood to be sources of happiness. As a result, "very few people consider the wisdom of the auspicious relationship between husband and wife through which God intends good for humanity, and which distinguishes human beings from animals."[164] According to Abdulqādir, following the divine laws of selection would enable men and women to live as lovers and experience true happiness.

The emphasis on the prevention of leading a 'sinful' and an 'imbalanced life' indicates that self-restraint and a definition of the appropriate norms of sexual conduct located within the scheme of 'divine laws of selection' was the desired goal of Abdulqādir. His stress on happiness as an outcome of such a process enables him to give further validity to his quest for appropriate familial reform. Reflecting on the need for reform of marital relationships, Abdulqādir writes that after a long search, he discovered a book on spousal selection by Dr. Koven explaining the rules of marriage from the perspective of natural laws and anatomy, which impressed him deeply.[165] Influenced by the medical analysis of relationships, Abdulqādir decided to write his text *Islāh-i Hayāt* within the framework of good health resulting from choice and proper compatibility between husband and wife, tutoring and training of children and the rules for living a healthy and virtuous life.

It is important to note here that while Abdulqādir emphasizes following physiological sciences in his recommendations, he believed that this was compatible with a pious life and that the unhealthy and improper life arising out of impoverished family relations were a violation of the rules of God, prophets and the ancient sages. [166] *Islāh-i Hayāt* thus

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[164] Ibid., iv.
[165] Ibid., vi. Abdulqādir does not mention the title of Koven's book
[166] Ibid., vii.

can be placed within the colonial quest to redefine and re-articulate piety and a proper religious life to redress social grievances while arguing simultaneously for a scientific appraisal and evaluation of the social order. Addressing not only Muslims, Abdulqādir writes that he has discussed questions of marriageable age, choice and selection of spouse, pregnancy and childbirth and healthy rearing of children in a manner that corresponds to 'human nature and the natural laws.' He had also elaborated "the physical and the mental damages, which a human being suffers as a result of violation of these rules and the text should thus prove useful for all religious communities."[167]

Asserting the primacy of marriage, Abdulqādir argues that to escape the predicaments of a bad marriage, there is a growing appreciation for celibacy amongst men and an increasing number of women have been forced to confront the prospect of an unmarried life. According to Abdulqādir, much of this interest in a celibate lifestyle has stemmed from economic reasons involving poverty and men wish to avoid the financial burden of supporting their wives and raising children. But instead of solving the problems arising from penury, Abdulqādir says that celibacy is causing men to spend their meager salaries on 'false friends' and commit 'unbalanced and sinful acts.' [168]

Although Abdulqādir does not specifically mention prostitution and refers to it euphemistically, the figure of the prostitute becomes significant in his attempt to define an ideal married life. A prostitute, says Abdulqādir, cannot be a well-wisher and a compassionate friend and does not provide the companionship necessary for living. By positing the prostitute in contrast to the wife, Abdulqādir framed his debate around the axis of the unsuitable 'false friend' against the compatible good wife. Furthermore his

[167] Ibid., viii.
[168] Muhammad Abdulqādir, *Islāh-i Hayāt* (1886), 2.

point of view demonstrates that the conception of a healthy marriage in late nineteenth century rested on societal norms of female sexuality defined in contradistinction to the figure of the prostitute.

According to Abdulqādir, young men who pretend to follow celibacy but resort to a prurient lifestyle suffer from addictions to sex, alcohol and other types of intoxicants and put their health and happiness into jeopardy. Witnessing the disputes and disagreements of married couples in their families and their neighborhoods, they become afraid of marriage and seek an immoral escape. In such an escape, one becomes less active and avoids hard work. For Abdulqādir, such a life and not raising of family, as assumed by most people, is the cause of poverty. Moreover, he argues that celibacy adversely affects health and the longevity of life. Thus to live a life of wealth and happiness is to overcome the fear of marriage and investigate marital arrangements before finalizing them in particular choosing the spouse carefully suited to one's temperaments and needs. [169] Following this proposition, Abdulqādir says that "those young men who marry will be happier than those who are celibate" because "marriage is the means to acquire true happiness and genuine comfort." [170]

Abdulqāadir's attempts to define a framework for a good and healthy marriage is not limited to the couple but is intrinsically related to childbirth and rearing of children. Like other reformers, Abdulqādir says that the principal purpose of marriage is to raise children. [171] The discussion of marriage thus simultaneously affirms a discourse on parenting and healthy childhood. Good parenting and harmonious marital relations were

[169] Ibid., 3-6.
[170] Ibid., 3, 5.
[171] Ibid., 8.

meshed together to generate the ideal family life. Through the production and dissemination of advice manuals like *Islāh-i Hayāt,* marriage alongside parenting became subject to systematic instruction.

To corroborate his vision of family, Abdulqādir cites Al-Ghazali's *Ihya'ul ulum al-din* (Revival of Religious Sciences) arguing that there are five aims of a marital life. These include the raising of children, control of sexual desire, management of the household, self-discipline especially in interacting with women and regeneration of one's group or community. [172] Abdulqādir returns again to Al-Ghazali later in the text when discussing the issue of spousal selection. The inclusion of Al-Ghazali at different moments in the text is of crucial significance in understanding Abdulqādir's approach to reform. Born in the eleventh century in the Khorasan province of Persia, Al-Ghazali is one of the most influential thinkers in Islamic civilization and his magnum opus, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* provides an extensive theological framework not only for acts of worship, asceticism and lawful conduct but also for details of everyday life including social etiquette, marriage, friendship and commerce. Abdulqādir's engagement with Al-Ghazali's views on marriage illustrates that as reformers posed questions about their institutions, they never abandoned critical approaches within their own tradition and often interpreted them in conjunction with Western texts of the period to produce a non-European trajectory of modernity.

As opposed to the maintenance of family and the sustenance of community, Abdulqādir laments that men and women nowadays were marrying for misguided reasons. Some men and women married to acquire greater prosperity through their

[172] Ibid., 8. See also Al-Ghazali, *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* trans. Muhammad al-Sharif (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiyah, 2011), 44-58.

nuptial ties whereas others focused on single qualities emphasizing the physical beauty of women. Such qualities, says Abdulqādir, generate only first impressions that are temporary and that apparent beauty does not evaluate genuine characteristics and if one were to marry only for such reasons, there would be no lasting love and happiness. [173] Even more damaging, according to Abdulqādir, is when people think that marriage cures diseases or alleviates their seriousness. When a healthy man is forced to marry an unhealthy woman or when an unhealthy man marries a healthy woman, their diseases are passed on to children affecting future generations. Instead of tormenting the life of innocent children with diseases, it would be better in these conditions to choose celibacy. [174]

The subject of health and the maintenance of disease-free lifestyle is the cornerstone of Abdulqādir's argument. What is unique in Abdulqādir's argument is that the conception of health is not exclusively a medical or a physiological one but incorporates an ideal of happy life enabled by following certain rules of conduct in marriage and rejecting those behaviors that inhibit the achievement of social happiness. Unlike modern medicine, Abdulqādir is drawing from Greco-Islamic medical system, in which the health of the human body cannot be extricated from that of nature and social life. [175]

The social conception of health in Abdulqādir's discourse is made harmonious with 'laws of nature.' According to Abdulqādir, a healthy marriage held at mature marriageable age based on mutual agreement of temperaments and love for children is

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[173] Ibid., 10,
[174] Ibid., 11-12.
[175] Byron Good and Mary Good, "The Comparative Study of Greco-Islamic Medicine: The Integration of Medical Knowledge into Local Symbolic Contexts," in *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge,* ed. Charles Leslie and Allan Young (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 257-71.

congruent with the laws of nature. Appeals to nature played a particularly significant role in Muslim reformist literature of late nineteenth century. Sayyid Ahmad Khān's natural theology rearticulated religious discourse in light of principles of nature in response to the scientific discoveries that he felt were challenging Islam.[176] In *Islāh-i Hayāt,* the category of 'nature' performs the ideological function of scientism legitimizing a didactic discourse and transforming advice into verifiable rational knowledge capable of untangling the dilemmas and sorrows of companionship.

Applying the concept of natural laws to social questions, Abdulqādir argues that the 'law of nature' has determined a specific marriageable age for men and women. In hot climates, he says, girls reach puberty between the ages of 9 and 12 whereas boys do so between 12 and 15. But the age of puberty, argues Abdulqādir, should not be confused with marriageable age. The human body continues to grow even after puberty and only when the individual is mature enough to be an adult should marriages be arranged.[177] Abdulqādir sets this age at 20 for women and 25 for men. Based on this observation, Abdulqādir warns against any form of interaction between men and women before this age. Not surprisingly, he also categorically denounces sexual intercourse before the marriageable age arguing that the "heart and the brain become weak, the face loses its grace, longevity declines and that human beings become a bag of diseases."[178] Children born of these marriages also suffer a similar fate of poor health and weak minds. Connecting the issue of marriageable age to women's education, Abdulqādir says that a

[176] Sayyid Ahmad Khān, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (Lahore: Premier Book House, 1968), reprint, v.
[177] Muhammad Abdulqādir, *Islah-i Hayāt* (1886), 14-15.
[178] Ibid., 17.

woman married at 12 or 13 as is customary is not intelligent or educated enough to raise children or manage the household economically. [179]

What is important in Abdulqādir's discussion of marriageable age is that it is not based on any liberal conception of consent where one would seek the opinion of the woman but on achieving good health and maximizing longevity of life. The debates in the Age of Consent bill also did not condemn the institution of child marriage but posed some restrictions on it by defining sexual intercourse with married and unmarried girls below the age of twelve as rape, punishable by imprisonment. Thus, both legislative as well as non-legislative attempts in late nineteenth century to redress social problems in marital life were divorced from the politics of liberal reformism.

Abdulqādir also explores the suitable age difference between men and women in marriage. He insists that women should be younger than men by a difference of five years because they must have strength to bear children and nurse them. [180] Complaining that the age difference between men and women is much higher in Indian society than appropriate, he says that much older men are married to younger women to acquire wealth or under the false belief that they would become more virile. Such matches only beget deadly diseases and weak children. On the other hand, if the woman is older than the man, there are instances of extra-marital affairs and infidelity that wreck havoc in the marriage. In such relationships, Abdulqādir identifies sexual indulgence and jealousy as forms of harmful illnesses that enervate human strength and also produce unhealthy children. [181]

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[179] Ibid., 19.
[180] Ibid., 25.
[181] Ibid., 21-22.

Alongside the concept of social health, Abdulqādir's efforts to portray and advocate an 'ideal' marriage was contingent on specific notions of a 'good wife' and a 'good husband.' Male reformist discourse in the late nineteenth century had produced the figure of the 'good wife' in texts advocating women's education. With the emergence of conjugality as a distinct issue, the equivalent discursive image of a 'good husband' also appears as an ideological counterpart to the 'good wife' in which both co-habit an 'ideal' marriage. Instead of directly mentioning his ideal prototypes, Abdulqādir considers in detail the types of men and women that both should avoid marrying to live a happy life. In his discussion of an 'ideal' wife, Abdulqādir emphasizes a familiar reformist discourse where the woman must be educated to attend efficiently to the household and the needs of her children. [182]

Despite the separate marking of duties associated with women, Abdulqādir nevertheless maintains a fairly similar criterion for men and the desired conduct of husbands. Like the wife, he insists that the husband should be hardworking, careful with his finances, of the correct marriageable age, of the same religious background and free from diseases.

The emphasis on absence of diseases and good health in husband and wife raised the issue of marriages held within the family. Abdulqādir says that that issue of marrying within the family or close relatives seems to be an "imaginary problem."[183] Arguing against the notion that such a match would bear children with mental deformities or illnesses, he says that if the proper rules for selection of spouse especially proper age and strong health are followed, such outcomes can be prevented. It is important to note that

[182] Ibid., 51-2.
[183] Ibid., 61.

the aspiration for healthy children wasn't simply a question of medical health. Abdulqādir argues that a Muslim man or a Muslim woman should not marry a Christian because there would be no agreement in such a marriage and "children would be shaky in their faith."[184] An ideal marriage therefore not only secured the health of its children but also had to ensure that the religious identity of its members was protected with no perceived foreign influences on the upbringing of the child.

One of the critical interventions of *Islāh-i Hayāt* is that it opened up a space for the critique and discussion of conduct from the perspective of the wife. Although written by a male and lacking in female voice, it nevertheless simultaneously imposed expectations and norms on men in order to create a happy marriage and live a 'reformed life.' Questioning the silence associated with family issues and the arrangement of marriages in a culture deeply suspicious of female opinion, he writes:

> If women talk about their marriage, it is considered a matter of great shame. If after marriage, husband and wife speak in front of their elders, it is indecent…if the husband and wife speak or play with their children in the presence of their parents, it is deemed shameless. Oh goodness, all this shame and dishonor. Such meaningless thoughts are born only in the absence of excellent education and rearing.[185]

In the chapter on the selection of the husband, Abdulqādir further criticizes the constraints placed on women's judgment about the behavior of men. Comparing the different standards of social conduct expected from men and women, he says:

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[184] Ibid., 54-55.
[185] Ibid., 61.

> What is the reason that if a woman has an affair before marriage, then she is accused and humiliated by everyone around her and all view her with contempt and avoid marrying her to the extent that they isolate and ostracize even her brother and her parents. On the other hand, if a man has an affair even a thousand times, people do not consider him of low character, they do not sever their relations with his parents, he is not looked down upon in contempt and no one refrains from marrying him. [186]

Attributing such an asymmetric reaction to men and accusing women of complicity in it, Abdulqādir directly addresses his female readers:

> Oh women, can you answer this question? Do you know the reason for this? Do you know who looks at you with contempt if anyone from amongst you has had just one affair? Who are the people who refrain from marrying such women? It is men. If a man has had an affair a thousand times, do you know who does not treat such men with contempt and doesn't avoid marrying them? It is women.[187]

Abdulqādir then connects the social conduct of men and women to larger questions of *tahzīb,* or culture. Continuing his advice to women, he says:

> Now do you consider this behavior of yours and that behavior of men just? No, this is an extreme case of injustice. O women, if you want respect, if you aspire for prestige, if you desire culture, then you should also avoid marrying such men, treat them with contempt and refrain from their company. O women, believe this that if you adopt this style, then within a short period, such behavior will weaken amongst men and genuine culture will spread in the world. For acquiring true culture, it is

[186] Ibid., 71-2.
[187] Ibid., 72.

necessary that a man also be as chaste and honorable as the woman. Both men and women should be equally careful about their chastity. [188]

In the paragraph above, Abdulqādir distills his fundamental purpose in authoring the text of *Islāh-i Hayāt.* While the stated aim of the text is compatible marriage and healthy children, 'chastity' or the regulation of sexuality is a more foundational goal of *Islāh-i Hayāt* and is intrinsic to Abdulqādir's argument. Abdulqādir sets absolute boundaries on acceptable standards of sexual conduct for both men and women to the extent of advocating contempt and ostracism for any violation. Expressing his concerns over hedonism and the habits of sexual excess, Abdulqādir says that "nowadays the idea that satisfaction of carnal desire is the world's greatest delight, that if there is any pleasure, fun and happiness in the world, then this is it, has become predominant." He gravely adds that "in this age, the disease of debauchery has spread all around. Both the young and the old are immersed into it." [189] Complaining that it is a rampant problem amongst men, he says that those who do not indulge in such behavior in their youth aren't considered men and that almost "every individual in order to add his name to the list of men plunges into adultery as early as possible."[190]

While Abdulqādir's pre-occupation with the control of sexuality defined the limits of appropriate behavior enforcing a hierarchical social organization, it also allowed him to question it. By objecting to the belief that sexual indulgence affirmed 'manhood' in society, he disputes prevalent notions of masculinity and turns masculinity into a site of reform and instruction. Reiterating his concern with health, he argues that an indulgent

[188] Ibid., 73.
[189] Ibid., 79.
[190] Ibid., 79.

lifestyle brings a plethora of diseases, weak children and an early death. [191] He attributes poor sexual habits to idle life, addiction to hot foods and intoxicants like alcohol, overexposure to tales of love and romance and bad sexual habits of parents, which are inherited by children.[192]

The mental and physical health of children along with their constitution and traits that they inherit from the parents is a re-occurring theme in *Islāh-i Hayāt.* According to Abdulqādir, health and happiness is guaranteed only when one "follows the rules of living with purity" and the meaning of "living with purity is that one abstain from sexual excess and indulge in sexuality only for the motive of birth and breeding."[193] Calling this in accord with 'laws of nature,' he argues that it is a duty that both husband and wife should have desire for and love of children to bring this purpose to fruition. [194]

The acquisition of happiness as a desirable state of being is inextricably linked to longing for and love of children in Abdulqādir's discourse of reform. Claiming that one achieves true happiness in life only when one has healthy and strong children, he writes:

> Can any individual imagine the happiness of that old man whose house is brimming with sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters? Can anyone measure what high levels the measure of happiness has reached in the heart of that old man? Can anyone express what comfort the old man feels at the sight of his own children? Such unlimited happiness and immeasurable comfort cannot be exchanged for any other kind of happiness and comfort. [195]

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[191] Ibid., 83-4.
[192] Ibid., 80-82
[193] Ibid., 99.
[194] Ibid., 119, 121.
[195] Ibid.,121-22.

Abdulqādir's envisioning of an old man surrounded by a large family demonstrates children as a benchmark of a happy life. In the ideology of colonial reform, the pursuit of happiness became a distinct goal and happiness was conceived within the framework of the family, tied exclusively to the experience of familial relationships in particular the company of children.

Although children and marriage are both closely associated with the advocacy of Abdulqādir's reforms, his commentary on parenting and rearing of children is weak and sketchy. Abdulqādir does not focus on the training of children emphasizing instead the tendencies and 'capacities' that children inherit from their parents. He argues that just as children inherit bodily constitution and diseases from their parents, they also receive habits, manners and ways of being that closely resemble their parents.[196] He categorizes the conduct of parents, activities during pregnancy and the earliest years of infancy as crucial in the development of the child's capacity. Despite all the efforts of education by teachers and elders afterwards in life, Abdulqādir says that the basic competency of the child is pre-determined by these criteria and cannot be undone. [197]

The central issue in *Islāh-i Hayāt* is the achievement of happiness through a 'healthy' married life. For Abdulqādir, the healthy life was not merely medically sound but one that ensured compatibility based on correct age, absence of medical diseases and addictions, and more importantly a regulated conduct of sexuality. In contrast to *Islāh-i Hayāt,* the issues that emerge in *Hidāyat-un-nissā* are markedly different and demonstrate the distinct perspectives from which men and women discussed these questions.

[196] Ibid., 140.
[197] Ibid., 135.

The author's son, Sayyid Muhammad, published Muhammad-un-nissā's *Hidāyat-un-nissā* posthumously in 1904. Muhammad-un-nissā was born in Delhi in 1856 and was the eldest daughter of Hājī Muhammad Alīmullāh Khān. Hājī Muhammad Alīmullāh Khān's elder brother, Maulvī Muhammad Hamīdullāh Khān was a jurist in the Nizām's Court of Hyderabad and his younger brother Maulvī Muhammad Samīullāh was trained as a lawyer. [198] Hājī Muhammad Alīmullāh Khān's son, brother of the author, was the Inspector of Post Offices in the Punjab.

In 1864, at the age of 8, Muhammad-un-nissā travelled to Mecca with her parents for the Hajj. After her return from Mecca, she was engaged to Maulvī Sayyid Muhammad Mīr, an advocate in high court and son of Sayyid Muhammad Mīr Bādshāh. Sayyid Muhammad Mīr Bādshāh and Hājī Muhammad Alīmullāh Khān were good friends, but Sayyid Muhammad Mīr Bādshāh was more closely associated with Alīmullāh Khān's younger brother Maulvī Samīullāh Khān. They both studied and passed law together. Later in their life, they also started legal practice and were appointed judges together. [199] Muhammad Samīullāh was posted in the town of Agra whereas Sayyid Muhammmad Mīr Bādshāh was posted in Meerut.

The engagement of Muhammad-un-nissā and Maulvī Sayyid Muhammad Mīr took place in 1865 but the marriage was delayed and held in 1875. Maulvī Sayyid Muhammad Mīr felt that the marriage had to be postponed till he started employment. After finishing his examinations and having worked for 6-7 months, he felt confident that he would be able to meet the expense of children, and thus married in early 1875. [200]

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[198] Muhammad-un-nissā, *Hidāyat-un-nissā,* (Hyderabad: Faqr Nizāmi Press, 1904), 3.
[199] Ibid., 3.
[200] Ibid., 4.

Sayyid Muhammad, who added a preface to the text, tells a fascinating story about the discovery of his mother's unpublished manuscript. After passing his college examinations in December 1902, Sayyid Muhammad was taken ill and advised to leave Delhi where he had spent his childhood. He moved to Hyderabad with his father making arrangements for the shifting of all family materials from Delhi and Meerut to Hyderabad. Amongst the heaps of papers and law books that arrived from Meerut, he incidentally noticed pieces of paper carrying his mother's handwriting. The books had been wrapped in these papers. [201] Puzzled by his mother's handwriting, he curiously started reading them and learnt that it was a section of a book that she was writing. He immediately dispatched a letter to his secretary in Meerut to search for all remnants of the book.

After an extensive search amongst the pile of mailed books, he discovered more scattered pages. Meanwhile, his secretary also sent all the handwritten pages that he had found. After reading them all carefully, Sayyid Muhammad says that he arranged the pages together into a book. Initially, he had intended to keep it safely but eventually decided to publish it in honor of his deceased mother "so that the good of the people that she had in mind be fulfilled."[202]

Muhammad-un-nissā died on 31 January, 1889 and Sayyid Muhammad writes that he was too young to remember much about her. He nevertheless constructs her personality from the memories of those who knew her. His paternal grandmother and paternal aunt told him that she loved them as her own natal family. Amongst her qualities, according to his paternal grandmother, were patience, politeness, service,

[201] Ibid., 1.
[202] Ibid., 2.

stability of temperament and fortitude. [203] Whenever his paternal grandmother visited Muhammad-un-nissā in Meerut, she would hand over the management of the house to her mother-in-law. [204] From his father, Sayyid Muhammad heard that his mother never gave his father any occasion to be unhappy. She enjoyed being a raconteur and in the stories that she narrated to children, she gave details of her own childhood and described the good things of their family, relatives or the other people of the city. [205]

Throughout the text, Muhammad-un-nissā employs different modes of writing to present her arguments. The first half of the book contains direct and opinionated exposition on the nature of marriage and familial relationships along with an important reproduction of a lengthy letter written by a father to his daughter on the occasion of her marriage. The second half of the text includes two unfinished didactic stories whose full version seems to have been lost.

Beginning the text in praise of the God and the Prophet, Muhammad-un-nissā explains that her objective in writing the book is to ensure that there would be in Urdu a book for girls on how to live comfortably with their husbands. Emphasizing the need for establishing harmony between husband and wife, she says that husband and wife should be friends, confidantes and advisors to each other. Muhammad-un-nissā places much of the responsibility for securing such a conjugal relationship on the woman and asserts a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife. The main quality, according to Muhammad-un-nissā, which guarantees a harmonious relationship is the obedience of the

[203] Ibid., 4-5.
[204] Ibid., 7.
[205] Ibid., 6.

wife. For Muhammad-un-nissā, obedience should not be practiced out of helplessness but should be inculcated in young girls through education. [206] She writes that:

> I am a woman and I, in my own city, and wherever else that I have lived and met and observed women and her conditions, I notice the reasons for problems in their homes. I have learnt that the reason for this is that girls were not given education that enabled them to appreciate their own worth and follow their duties. [207]

From an early age, says Muhammad-un-nissā, girls' play with dolls shapes the pattern that women's lives will take. They dress dolls, marry them, make them raise children and generally take care of their toys. But the dolls aren't real human beings and girls cannot discover how to maintain their relationships through this play. In addition to their dolls, girls learn about stories from the elderly women in the family that inform them about how to cope with problems in life. But neither of these two modes of interactions in the young lives of women is helping them achieve peace after their marriage and some stories were even breeding hostility between women and the husband's family. [208]

Muhammad-un-nissā contextualizes the significance of literacy available to women of her generation. She writes that education amongst Muslim girls had become common within her age group but it was an idea that was unacceptable in her grandmother's and great-grandmother's generation. While this had brought its benefits and was necessary, according to Muhammad-un-nissā, it had also produced new problems within the family. Through the practice of reading and writing, young woman could now reveal their own feelings in letters and also become familiar with the state of others. This had greatly

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[206] Ibid., 3.
[207] Ibid., 3-4.
[208] Ibid., 7-8.

increased the risk of slander of family members. To check the spread of gossip and misinformation as a result of this habit, it had become more necessary to discuss the cultivation of good manners in marriageable young women and prevent malice amongst close relations.

Muhammad-un-nissā argues that tensions between the wife and her husband's family were more rampant amongst the Muslims than the Hindus. She says that amongst the Hindus, marriage takes place at such a young age that the rearing of the girl becomes the responsibility of her in-laws and she eventually comes to regard them as her real and actual relatives. On the other hand, Muslims marry at a later age by which time the girl has already been educated and shaped by her parents. Consequently, she joins the husband's family with fully formed opinions and attitudes and is handed the responsibility of managing all the tasks of the husband's family. According to Muhammad-un-nissā, this generates familial conflicts and the attempts at women's education must therefore involve instruction in resolving these unnecessary tensions and achieving harmony. [209]

In offering advice to young women, Muhammad-un-nissā engages a patriarchal discourse opposing equality of manners between men and women. Chastising women who make such claims, she writes

> Some girls ask why they should be submissive all the time. They say that they will follow husband's commands only if he follows theirs. If he doesn't listen, they also won't listen. That they will behave well with his brother and sister only if he behaves well with theirs. That he should regard my relatives, then I will also have

[209] Ibid., 9.

regard for his relatives. But this is wrong. Those who want to make a claim for equality are stupid and ignorant.[210]

Muhammad-un-nissā's strong attempts to distance herself from the 'claim for equality' demonstrates that social equality between men and women had become a forceful position in Indian society by the 1880s prior to the Age of Consent bill and had started to elicit hostile responses from writers and reformers. In her argument, citing the belief that God created Eve to give Adam company and to eliminate his loneliness, Muhammad-un-nissā says that the duty of women is to ensure the happiness and comfort of their husbands and thereby fulfill the purpose for which they were created. She illustrates her argument further through a Qurānic verse calling men the guardian of women and enjoining women to be obedient. [211] She also mentions a Hadith where a woman once asked the Prophet what the rights of men were with respect to their wives. According to Muhammad-un-nissā, the Prophet answered that it was the duty of the wife to obey her husband to the extent that she shouldn't fast, give charity or leave the home without his permission. Then the woman asked, 'who amongst women has the greatest claim over men' and 'who amongst men has the greatest claim over women.' The Prophet replied that it was the mother who had the greatest claim over men and it was the husband who had the greatest claim over women. When the woman countered if she had any claim over the husband, the Prophet is said to have answered that she had hundredth part of the husband's claim. [212]

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[210] Ibid., 10-11.
[211] Ibid., 11. Also see, *The Qur'an,* trans. M.H Shakir, "Surah Al-Nissa (The Women), Verse 34" (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1997): 75.
[212] Muhammad-un-nissā, *Hidāyat un-nissā,* (Hyderabad: Faqr Nizāmi Press, 1904), 12-13.

Muhammad-un-nissā's discussion of the above Hadith in favor of her position not only allows her to give legitimacy to her unyielding views on gender relations but also reveals that historically, the practice of religious interpretation and disputation in late nineteenth century was an opportunity becoming available to women too and was not exclusively the prerogative of men. The colonial period in India witnessed the rise of a dynamic religious public sphere where the context for the appropriation of sacred symbols and legitimization of religious authority amongst different groups was intense. [213] Although women were situated outside the framework of religious institutions and formal training, the spread of women's education enabled women to claim religious authority and construct their argument through the interpretation of scripture and invocation of tradition. The emergence of conservative voices like that of Muhammad-un-nissā reveal what Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar have described as a 'new social category of the woman writer.' [214]

In addition to citing the Prophet, Muhammad-un-nissā also employs two other styles of argument to persuade her readers and add strength to her opinion. In the first, she includes a conversation about marriage between a young Indian girl and a Christian missionary woman responsible for the girl's education. In the conversation between the young girl and her teacher, the Indian girl enquires how marriages are arranged amongst the English. Towards the end of their talk, the missionary teacher says that the opinion of parents matter most in marriages and both the girl and the missionary eventually agree

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[213] Barbara Metcalf, "Imagining Community: Polemical Debates in Colonial India," in *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages,* ed. Kenneth W. Jones, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 229-40.
[214] Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, "Introduction" in *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader,* ed. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 4.

that the manner of arranging marriages amongst Indians is wiser than that of the English. In the second style of argument, Muhammad-un-nissā produces a letter that a father wrote to his daughter before her marriage advising her to obey the wishes of the husband and his family. In both the arguments involving the conversation and the letter, the figure of the Christian missionary teacher and the father voice the beliefs of Muhammad-un-nissā. By bringing herself in agreement with the cultural and educational personage of the missionary located outside her tradition as well as parental authority of the father, Muhammad-un-nissā directs her argument towards her readers who may have been influenced by colonial criticisms of Indian customs and institutions.

During the conversation between the Christian missionary teacher and the Indian girl, the missionary explains that within their community, unlike the Indians, men and women freely interact with each other and there is no custom of *purdah* in their society. On the question of marriage, she says that both men and women meet to understand each other and their parents view this with consideration. [215] Despite this freedom, the missionary adds that parents still watch over their daughters because they can be naïve and are not always familiar with people outside their families. To balance her argument, the missionary says that in her community, even young men do not have complete freedom to marry whom they choose and suffer from the same naïveté that young women do in their judgments.

The consent of parents remains an important condition throughout the explanations of the missionary and is never abandoned to highlight the choice of children against that of parents. Continuing her reasoning, the missionary says that if men and women fall in love

[215]Muhammad-un-nissā, *Hidāyat-un-nissā* (Hyderabad: Faqr Nizāmi Press, 1904), 25.

with each other, the young man approaches the parents and they decide if the relationship is to be accepted or rejected. On the other hand, if the parents disapprove of the relationship and if the young woman still insists on it or rebels, the missionary adds that "such women are considered bad in our society." [216] In this revealing comment, Muhammad-un-nissā discloses her own views about young women who strongly refuse marriage proposals arranged by their parents or those who had subverted social boundaries of 'respectability' to fall in love prior to their marriage.

The missionary appears most tellingly as the voice of Muhammad-un-nissā when she calls love blind and discourages it amongst the young. According to Muhammad-un-nissā, the force of their passion leads young men and women to believe that their love has correctly discerned each other's temperament and they thus hastily decide to marry. But after marriage when they are in proximity to each other all the time and are confronted by each other's imperfections, the love weakens sowing seeds of conflict in their marriage. The parents, therefore, are better judges of personality because they have not been blinded by love and can investigate the character of those involved fully through their acquaintances. The Indian girl upon hearing the missionary's argument, agrees with her and concludes that what parents do is best for their daughters and that daughters cannot acquire the same quality of judgment as her parents. [217]

More important than the conversation between the Christian missionary and the young Indian girl in shaping Muhammad-un-nissā's views about women and their education is the letter from the father to the daughter that she reproduces in her book. From Muhammad-un-nissā's account, the letter is an authentic document written by a father to

[216] Ibid., 26.
[217] Ibid., 27.

her daughter named Rabia immediately after Rabia's marriage. After reading the letter, Muhammad-un-nissā claims that she visited Rabia's home and lived there for a week to view its impact upon Rabia's life.

The letter itself begins on a consoling note where the father allays Rabia's distress over her separation from her family and expresses his own and the ache of others over Rabia's absence in the house. He then says that her 'new home' is where is she lives now and counsels that "therefore you should understand properly the ups and downs of this new home so that you do not stumble and can easily traverse the path of this new life."[218] He asks her to consider her husband's close relations including his mother, his brother and his aunt as her 'real relatives.' He reasons that honesty of sentiments is more important with them than with her 'natural relations' because her 'natural relations' were 'blood relations' who would love her no matter what her deeds or feelings but her husband's relatives did not have this advantage and therefore would have to be maintained and won over through her own affection and conduct. He says that in order to become her husband's beloved, she must obey and sympathize with him, be his well-wisher and a confidante in all affairs of life. [219]

The father then details each of these qualities in the letter. In obeying her husband, he asks her to consider his happiness as more than that of her own and to derive cheerfulness from his happiness. He insists that the obedience of the wife is not like that of a slave to his owner or that of a servant to his master but one that is based on love in which one gains not only the affection of his family but also that of Prophets and God. At the level

[218] Ibid., 30.
[219] Ibid., 31.

of everyday interaction, he suggests that she should not be irritable or annoyed in conversations and try to maintain a calm resolve to keep quarrels to the minimum. [220]

In describing the quality of a well-wisher, the father evokes the figure of the political minister. He says that her daughter should combine the qualities of a mother and minister where she should attend to his health and concern with motherly care and manage his money the way a minister carries out the tasks of state-management. [221] Amongst the three qualities, the father mentions the role of confidante as the most central and difficult one for his daughter. He says that his daughter must gain the trust of her husband against several myths and beliefs about women that portray them as unreliable.

To elaborate what his daughter is up against, he mentions a long story in which the husband discovers that he should not trust his wife with any secrets. In the story, a young man sets out on a journey to another town and meets a fellow traveler who in exchange for three thousand rupees gives him three pieces of advice to ease his travels and help him in life. The three counsels include not divulging secrets to any woman, not depending upon the friendship of a policeman and not entering into any loan transaction with a local trader. Both the young man and the traveler arrive in another town where the traveler promises to prove himself correct. As the young man settles in that town with his wife, he becomes friendly with a local policeman and both his wife and the policeman's wife also become close acquaintances. Meanwhile, a woman is found murdered in the town and is unrecognizable because she has been beheaded. The traveler informs the young man that this could be an occasion to see if his money spent was worth the advice. The young man buys a goat's head from the market, wraps it in cloth and buries it in his

[220] Ibid., 32-33.
[221] Ibid., 33.

house. Without giving any details, he simply tells his wife that no one should know what is buried here for it could cost him his life. As the days pass, the policeman's wife and the young man's wife discuss the case increasing the former's fears that her husband is the killer and the buried object is the head. Finally, she informs the policeman's wife about the buried object and the policeman arrives to arrest the young man. They all then discover that it is only a goat's head and the young man was innocent. [222]

Following this story, the father cautions Rabia that she should never gossip nor discuss her husband's flaws with her friends or other members of the family. In a grim tone, he says that "in matters relating to issues between husband and wife, no other person can help. Only the wife herself can help herself most easily. "[223] The final piece of advice asks the daughter to be her husband's assistant and friend who supports him in his various tasks to the extent that her knowledge permits and to not turn disagreements into familial disputes. The father concludes by wishing Rabia a happy life and is signed with the initials 'S.M.'

What is revealed in the letter is not simply the advice the father gives to his daughter but that letters and not just published books were also part of advice literature in late nineteenth century. What is remarkable in Rabia's father's letter is the systematic format of suggestions and advice including the form of storytelling even though the letter was not originally composed for publication.

Muhammad-un-nissā also gives a brief account of the conversation that she had with Rabia during her visit. Her questions directed to Rabia reveal her specific concerns about marriage and conjugality. Referring to Rabia's husband's family, she asks her how it has

[222] Ibid., 34-9.
[223] Ibid., 43.

been living with them since her marriage. Rabia responds that she had been treated very well because she had treated them very well. She had cast herself in their image and had become like them. [224] Her mother-in-law treated her like her own daughter. [225] Muhammad-un-nissā then enquires from Rabia if she is happy. Rabia also replies to this question in the affirmative and adds that her father "used to say that one should consider oneself grateful considering those who are less fortunate in life and one should not be jealous when looking at those who are more fortunate than we." [226] Furthermore, she says that she remains grateful to God in all circumstances and that if she were to compare herself to a happier, wealthier or more beautiful woman and become upset over it, it would be entirely pointless. Expressing her contentment, she says that God has made each one different and this difference is his wisdom. [227]

Muhammad-un-nissā posits Rabia as a role model for young women and her attitude as the key to achieving personal and familial happiness. She concludes that Rabia's distinct gratefulness towards God can only be acquired through a religious education. Based on this observation, she argues that the declining importance of religious education in her time is the reason why women "today, compared to previous times, are not happy in their homes." [228]

The second section of *Hidāyat-un-nissā* contains two stories, which are left incomplete. A small note at the final page of each story carries a note, which mentions that more pages of the story could not be found. The first story is titled 'Khadīja Begum

[224] Ibid., 49.
[225] Ibid., 50.
[226] Ibid., 51.
[227] Ibid., 52.
[228] Ibid., 56.

and her husband Khwājah Sayyid' while the second one is called 'Muhammad Tāhir and his brother Muhammad Qāsim.' 'Khadīja Begum and her husband Khwājah Sayyid' seems almost complete and conveys the central message of Muhammad-un-nissā. Khwājah Sayyid is the son of Khwājah Wahīd who was employed as a jurist in the court of Emperor Bahādur Shāh of Delhi. Born in Delhi, Khwājah Sayyid receives his primary education in Agra and then studies at several towns outside of Delhi to complete his secondary education. [229]

Despite his noble background and education, Khwājah Sayyid is of poor character and is fickle, ill tempered and a spendthrift. He is living in Benaras idling away with equally bad friends when his marriage is arranged to Khadīja Begum. Khadīja Begum cuts a contrasting figure to her husband in all her habits and discovers after her marriage that her husband is neither a man of high character nor interested in living in Delhi with her even after marriage. Not surprisingly, the story then is a series of interventions by Khadīja Begum that successively improve Khwājah Sayyid and establish his respectable status in the family and society.

In the first stage of interventions, Khadīja Begum writes a letter to Khwājah Sayyid immediately after marriage asking him to return to Delhi for a better life. Impressed by his wife's convictions, Khwājah Sayyid decides to abandon Benaras and his old ways for Delhi. When he discovers that he has exhausted all his money and is without the amount to travel to Delhi, Khadījah Begum sends him some of her jewelry to arrange for the money. [230] After he arrives in Delhi, Khadījah Begum suggests that he should take his examinations in law and make himself eligible for employment. She again provides him

[229] Ibid., 59.
[230] Ibid., 62-72.

the money to buy books and Khwājah Sayyid begins intensive preparations for his examinations. [231]

After submitting his exam papers in Allahabad, Khwājah Sayyid returns to Delhi and eagerly awaits his result. In the second stage of interventions, Khadīja Begum advices Khwājah Sayyid to discuss his exam with his father and then review it further with Hāfez Azīzuddīn, a lawyer based in their neighborhood. During his conversations with Hāfez Azīzuddīn, his father suggests that he should apprentice with Hāfez Azīzuddīn till the release of the exam results and acquire experience in the legal profession. While training under Hāfez Azīzuddīn, Khwājah Sayyid learns that he has passed his examinations and decides to move to Aligarh to start his practice. Initially, he lives alone because Khadīja Begum chooses to stay with her in-laws in Delhi but after a few months, they all leave for Aligarh. The story ends abruptly while they are living in Aligarh. [232]

Although the tale of 'Khadīja Begum and her husband Khwājah Sayyid' runs on a predictable course and is intended for advice, there are nevertheless some striking features that emerge from the story. The central concern of Muhammad-un-nissā's reform was women's education and the subsequent construction of an 'ideal wife' but the plot of 'Khadīja Begum and her husband Khwājah Sayyid' unfolds around the making of the 'good husband' through the interventions of the wife. The good husband here pays careful attention to his education, wishes decent employment to support his family and is never opposed to his wife's wishes. Muhammad-un-nissī may have intended to portray the 'ideal wife' in the character of Khadīja Begum but inadvertently fashioned a distinct male subjectivity in Khwājah Sayyid, which was open to supervision and training from

[231] Ibid., 72-81.
[232] Ibid., 81-100.

his wife, Khadīja Begum. Like Muhammad Abdulqādir, we witness again in Muhammad-un-nissā that the notion of an 'ideal husband' was emerging as a central question in discussions on conjugality in the late nineteenth century.

What is most conspicuous in this story is how the trait of obedience of the wife to the husband, so much cherished and preached by Muhammad-un-nissā in the earlier section of the book, is unwittingly thrown into question. Khadīja Begum hardly ever obeys her husband, controls all aspects of Khwājah Sayyid's life and Khwājah Sayyid passively follows all her instructions. As Muhammad-un-nissā's account illustrates, there were contradictions even amongst those who argued the most categorical and prescriptive position for the role of women in family and society.

Thus, the main arc of *Hidāyat-un-nissā* is focused on obedience and endorses a social model where women's duties are attached to the happiness and maintenance of her husband's well-being and that of his family. To fully understand the nature of Muhammad-un-nissā's argument, it would be valuable to consider Muhammadī Begum's *Rafīq-i Arūs* (The Bride's Companion) published in 1906.

Muhammadī Begum (1878?-1908) was the daughter of Maulvī Ahmad Shafīq who was a government official in the state of Punjab. She was educated at home and learnt to read Urdu and memorized the Quran. She was married at the age of nineteen to Mumtāz Alī, an Urdu scholar and pioneer of women's education who founded the weekly journal of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* (The Women's Reformer) in 1898. Muhammadī Begum and Mumtāz

Alī together edited the journal and wrote several columns and articles on questions of family reform and women's education.[233]

The first line of *Rafīq-i Arūs* indicates the purpose of Muhammadī Begum's writing and brings her into affinity with Muhammad-un-nissā in the nineteenth century. She says that "the real reason for the structure and composition of this book is the invaluable advice letter that my father wrote to me during the days of my marriage."[234] After she became responsible for the editorial work at *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* Muhammadī Begum writes that she started reflecting more on the nature of articles and columns that could be published in the journal. The more she read and re-read the views of her father, the more she realized that the letter was a microcosm of all that she wished to be included in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān.* After much consideration, she decided to write a series of articles on each aspect of her father's advice. It was published in 1901 as *Rafīq–i Arūs* and became extremely popular. The positive reception of the text led Muhammadī Begum to write a second edition in 1905,[235] with more columns and an extended commentary on previous chapters. [236]

Much like Muhammad-un-nissā, the letter of the father to his daughter giving suggestions on how to cope with married life shaped Muhammadī Begum's view of marriage and subsequently significant portions of *Rafīq-i Arūs.* The letter by Maulvī Ahmad Shafīq, Muhammadī Begum's father, was written on 2nd August, 1897 five months before her marriage as a form of advice manual.

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[233] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110-114.
[234] Muhammadi Begum, *Rafiq-e Arus* (Lahore: Rifah-e Aam, 1906), Preface, i.
[235] The printing press mentions 1906 as the date of publication whereas Muhammadī Begum wrote the new preface to the text in 1905.
[236] Preface, i-ii.

Highlighting that his letter is the most important one for Muhammadī Begum, Ahmad Shafīq writes that "it must be remembered that the relation between a man and a woman in the world is a strange one. The duty in this relationship is that one should love the other more than their own life." [237] If this is not possible, he continues, "then the purity and honor of this relationship has not been understood." To fully explicate his feelings, Ahmad Shafīq constructs a triadic discourse around love, discretion and self-respect. Love, says Ahmad Shafīq, is related to the heart but some people degrade their beloved in expressing their affection. Love, therefore, must be balanced by the capacity of discretion and when they both combine, it gives rise to a "curious remedy," which can comfort all sorrows. [238] Furthermore, according to Ahmad Shafīq, without self-respect, there can be no love. Only when one learns to respect oneself do others also start to respect us. [239] A crucial aspect here in *Rafīq-i Arūs* is the mention of self-respect as a criterion for respecting the husband and its implications for the fashioning of an autonomous self, distinct from the obligation of duty discussed in *Hidāyat-un-nissā.* Compared to *Hidāyat-un-nissā, Rafīq-i Arūs* thus creates a greater space for the expression of female intimacy.

In addition to self-respect, Ahmad Shafīq also asks her daughter to develop courage. Insisting that Muhammadī Begum should not change her opinion if it is correct or remain silent in any assembly out of fear of reproach, he directs her to explain her reasoning

[237] Main Text, 98-99.
[238] Ibid., 99.
[239] Ibid., 100.

regardless of anyone's reaction and to be afraid only of the reproach of her own conscience and not anything else. [240]

Alongside advice about self and intimacy, Ahmad Shafīq's letter also contains general commentaries about the status of women in India. In a semblance to other reformers, he argues that housekeeping, in particular the management of the kitchen and cooking, is central to a good domestic life, and one in which Indian women are sadly inept. Emphasizing the obligations of living in a joint family, he adds that "in our country, women have to face one more great difficulty, which is that the husband's family views their actions constantly with criticism."[241] Like Muhammad-un-nissā's letter, he counsels Muhammadī Begum not only to strive to keep her husband happy but also to be good and polite with the members of his family and the servants of the household. If there is any difference of opinion, it must be resolved politely through dialogue. If there are still problems in developing a relationship, he specifically warns her that she shouldn't abandon her efforts for other friends outside the family. [242]

Ahmad Shafīq also reflects briefly on the status of women in non-Islamic beliefs. Commenting on the religious practices of non-Muslims, particularly the Greeks and Hindus, he writes that he "has often wondered in life why women have been worshipped in the past and still are worshipped today." Addressing his long-held rumination, Ahmad Shafīq argues that, unlike men, women have several qualities, especially beauty, empathy, sincerity, love, honor and care of the community, which are integral to them. Ahmad Shafīq's conclusion to his daughter based on these ideas is more striking than the

[240] Ibid., 108-109.
[241] Ibid., 104.
[242] Ibid., 104, 106.

essentializing of women in the letter. As a result of these qualities, he says that "women are not worshipped in Islam but if you fall in love with a woman, then there is greater reflection for her than for God."[243]

There are two aspects of the letter, which are unique to it, that have important historical implications. First is that Muhammadī Begum married Mumtāz Alī, who had been married before and had two children who needed to be attended and to be taken care of by her.[244] Mentioning this crucial aspect of her married life, Ahmad Shafīq wrote that "in your condition, the most difficult eventuality that you will have to confront is that you will have to deal with two small children." [245] Advising that treating a motherless child with kindness and compassion is one of the best deeds of this world, he confidently adds that he is assured that she would treat them well because she is already good with children. Muhammadī Begum's marriage and her father's advice reflects the diverse marital arrangements that women often encountered when they commenced their married life.

A second marriage for a man after the death of his first wife was a permissible social practice in society and signaled a different mode of relation for women than marrying a childless, young man who had never been married. In *Rafīq-i Arūs,* Muhammadī Begum is more precise on the dilemmas of parenting children not one's own than on giving advice about it. If one tried to admonish or discipline the children, one ran the risk of being accused by others of step-motherly treatment towards the child. On the other hand, if one were conscious of being a step-mother and hesitated from reprimanding them, one

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[243] Ibid., 107.
[244] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 112.
[245] Muhammadī Begum, *Rafīq-i Arūs* (Lahore: Rifah-e Aam, 1906), 103.

could spoil them and raise them poorly. Muhammadī Begum's advice on such matters is simply to learn to love carefully and moderately so that one doesn't suffer from either extreme even though achieving such a balance would require struggle and accuracy of feeling. [246]

The prospect of marrying a husband who had once been married wasn't only limited to a widower but also included for women the possibility of polygyny. The sensitive issue of polygyny comes under scrutiny during the late nineteenth century within the Muslim community in the context of debates raging between Christian missionaries, evangelical colonial officials like William Muir and Indian reformers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali. By early twentieth century, concerned writers and activists such as Bashīruddīn Ahmad, Rāshid-ul Khairī and Akbarī Begum started offering advice to women on how to endure the tribulations of a polygynous marriage. Much like the counsels of Bashīruddīn Ahmad and Akbarī Begum, Muhammadī Begum acknowledges the pain of a woman who is the second wife to her husband but refrains from any critique of the institution. Her advice to second wives is to maintain a friendly relation with the first wife and strive to purge from themselves those traits that might disturb the husband. [247]

The second crucial factor, which has significant historical ramifications, is that Ahmad Shafīq asks Muhammadī Begum to definitely read the father's letter in Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirāt ul-Arūs* (The Bride's Mirror). *Mirāt ul-Arūs* is a story of contrast between two sisters, Asghari, who is educated and well-mannered, and Akbari, who is uneducated and subsequently arrogant and ill-mannered. In the story, Durandesh Khan, father of Akbari

[246] Ibid., 93-5.
[247] Ibid., 84-7.

and Asghari, writes a letter to her younger, 'ideal' daughter, Asghari before her marriage. In the letter, Durandesh Khan informs Asghari that her marriage is a beginning of a new world, whose responsibilities she must bear well. Specifically, he asks her to maintain amity and concord in domestic life and her familial relations rather than blemish them with quarrels and disputes. Invoking the belief in the legend of Adam and Eve, Durandesh Khan says that the duty of a wife is to keep her husband happy and also be a vigilant guardian of his wealth. Maintaining his focus on familial happiness, he asks Asghari not to gossip about her husband or his family and to respect them in all circumstances. After reading the letter, Asghari is emotionally overawed by it and promises to read it regularly everyday. [248]

Ahmad Shafīq's mention of Nazīr Ahmad's letter points to the positive reception of *Mirāt ul-Arūs* amongst the Urdu speaking community of *sharīf* Muslims. At the same time, if Rabia's letter in *Hidāyat-un-nissā,* Muhammadī Begum's letter and Nazīr Ahmad's letter are taken together, they also highlight important elements of a social practice in the father-daughter bond, which appear crucial to understanding both parenting and marital relations. The letter becomes a rite of passage for the father as well as the daughter and it ensures that the father's duties in preparing his daughter for her 'new life' are adequately fulfilled. Thus, it is not only the norms of good mothering that are advocated in advice literature but it also implicitly contains notions of fatherhood and parenting by men. What is more significant is that fathers shape more significantly women's views about marriage than their mothers and thus practices associated with fatherhood become critical in understanding conjugality as women experienced it.

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[248] Nazīr Ahmad, *The Bride's Mirror,* trans. G.E.Ward (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), reprint, 59-62.

It is also important to note that women followed the advice of their fathers not simply out of duty but also out reverence for their fathers. In response to her father, Muhammadī Begum writes that her "modest intellect didn't have the words to express what she experienced upon examining the contents of the letter."[249] She says that she read the letter of love several times but it wasn't sufficient to simply read the letter. She wished to imbibe the letter as if it were a talisman and promised to read it regularly and imprint each page in her mind. Like the letter, her book contains similar counsels for women and Muhammadī Begum emphasizes respect towards husband and his family, care of the home and asks women to cultivate self-control and stoicism in their negative feelings.

The final text under analysis in this chapter is *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* (Philosophy of Marriage) written by Sayyid Alī Asghar Bilgrāmī's (1851-1911) in 1909. *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* is based on Sylvanus Stall's *What a Husband Ought to Know* from the popular *Sex and the Self* series that were published in the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Sylvanus Stall was a Lutheran Pastor who published *What a Boy Ought to Know,* the first in the series, in 1897 followed by *What a Husband Ought to Know* in 1899. Sayyid Alī Asghar Bilgrāmī's (Sayyid Bilgrāmī) hailed from the well-known family of the Bilgrāmīs who were influential power brokers in the region of North India particularly the United Provinces or the Awadh during Mughal rule. During the colonial period, they were employed in civic administration and maintained their political and social influence in society. Sayyid Bilgrāmiī received his education from Canning College and Patna College in the cities of Lucknow and Bankipur respectively. He

[249] Ibid., 113-114.

pursued his higher education from University of Cambridge and worked for the Nizām of Hyderabad for nearly ten years till 1879.

'What a Husband Ought to Know' seems to have caught the attention of Sayyid Bilgrāmī not in India but in England. In 1909, the year of *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj's* publication, Sayyid Bilgrāmī had already retired (in 1901) from the Nizām's service in Hyderabad and had settled in England. Well versed in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, German, French and Latin, he was appointed the Lecturer in Marathi at Cambridge University in 1902 and assigned by the India Office Library to catalogue the collections of Arabic and Persian. Amongst his prominent works is a text on the archaeological remains of Hyderabad, comparative linguistic analysis of Persian and Sanskrit and Urdu translation of Gustave LeBon's Civilization of the Arabs. [250]

In his work in *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj,* Sayyid Bilgrāmī writes that he has ignored irrelevant things in the original text to select only 'beneficial' ideas transforming *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* into neither an exact translation nor an original document but a trans-creation of literature from one language into another. My main aim in this analysis is to illustrate what *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* appropriated from Stall's manual into its own and how it located itself within Urdu literature to resonate with its readers.

Deeming the publication of *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* necessary, Sayyid Bilgrāmī argues that the tendency amongst elders to avoid any discussion on the relationship between men and women had led to the spread of ignorance and misconceptions about these matters and the birth of endless social problems. Specifically, he added that through this text, he

[250] Jain, N. *Muslims in India: A Biographical Dictionary, Volume 1 (A-K)* (Delhi: Manohar, 1979): 133-34.

wished to address the dangerous consequences that had become prevalent in Indian society following the introduction of modern education.

At a fundamental level, the primary aim of both *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* and *What a Husband Ought to Know* is the regulation of sexuality and the demarcation of socially acceptable norms, which locates sexual practices firmly within the domain of marriage and family. Resembling *Islāh-i Hayāt* in its purpose and published almost two decades after *Islāh-i Hayāt*, *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* thus is a sister text of *Islāh-i Hayāt* informed by American Christian discourse that also aimed to discipline sexuality through the discourse of familial reform.

What a Husband Ought to Know is divided into three sections, each relating to the subjects of 'husband,' 'wife' and 'children' whereas *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* eliminates the part on children and also adds some information to the section on 'wife.' More generally, Stall's publications were segregated along gender lines and addressed specifically to male readers whereas Sayyid Bilgrāmī's text places no particular emphasis on men in its title leaving the book open to a possible female readership.

Like Stall, Sayyid Bilgrāmī begins the book with an exaltation of love celebrating it as the emotion that makes life worthwhile and allows a perfect union between two individuals.[251] Following this note, Sayyid Bilgrāmī departs from Stall's texts and leaves out the illustration of life processes of growth and reproduction as well as details of biological differences between men and women. Although Sayyid Bilgrāmī ignores biology, he does, however, endorse Stall's understanding of the 'complementary' nature of emotions and intellect amongst men and women where women are represented as

[251] Sayyid Alī Bilgrāmī, *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* (Agra: Muhammad Ibrahim Khan Private Press, 1909), 4-5.

more amenable to feelings while men are seen to respond to 'reason.' But the primary appropriation in *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* from the Stall's section on 'husband' is the emphasis on sexual moderation and mutuality in marital relationships.

Foregrounding the concern of sexual restraint against everything, Sayyid Bilgrāmī writes that "the greatest war is that which is fought against one's own sexuality."[252] Relating the practice of sexual restraint to that of health and good living, Sayyid Bilgrāmī argues that incontinence in sexuality injures physical health, deteriorates the mind and destroys good habits. For Sayyid Bilgrāmī, as in Stall, marriage acquires its uniqueness through moderation and such moderation provides focus and discipline in life. Condemning in particular men who oppose marriage, Sayyid Bilgrāmī writes that they belong to a class of individuals who hold low and debased views about women and engage in sexual activity purely for hedonism and regard women to be an instrument for their immoderate desires.[253]

In addition to moderation, Sayyid Bilgrāmī also endorsed from Stall concepts of mutuality and reciprocity in conjugal relationships. According to Sayyid Bilgrāmī, out of selfishness, some men regard their wives as property and thus deprive them of their natural rights. Turning 'nature' into a politically discursive category from which 'rights' or *haq* originate, he adds that the rights which nature has given to each individual does not imply that one become a master of another. Well-mannered men, he says, nurture their wives with the same rights that they have been given.[254]

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[252] Ibid., 36.
[253] Ibid., 18.
[254] Ibid., 26.

In a notable departure from Stall, it is crucial to mention here that the concept of 'rights from nature,' which Sayyid Bilgrāmī draws upon to argue for mutuality is not present in Stall. For Stall, the lack of reciprocal relations between the husband and the wife aren't so much destructive of 'natural rights' but of happiness. According to Stall, in order to secure a comfortable home and a happy future, it is necessary for the husband to provide the same comfort and happiness to his wife and children, which they would provide to him.[255] On the other hand, Sayyid Bilgrāmī's appropriation of 'nature' for the defense of reciprocal conjugal relationships corresponds well with the larger trend in colonial Muslim thought in late nineteenth century. Both Bilgrāmī's and Abdulqādir's use of 'nature' constitutes a conversation with Sayyid Ahmad Khan's 'natural theology' and the continuous identification of concepts such as that of 'nature' drawn from an episteme of popular scientific knowledge available to reformers in colonial India.

Extending the argument for mutuality to a larger critique of obedience, Sayyid Bilgrāmī in a similar vein to Stall says that "if the husband thinks that the meaning of wife is obedience and if obedience means that he can rule over her, then this word (wife) should be eliminated from the record of civilization." [256] Adding practices of domesticity and household management to the equation, he further states that "it is the duty of the husbands that they help their wife in the tasks of housekeeping. It is shameful that women be left alone in the war of housekeeping." [257]

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[255]Sylvanus Stall, *What a Young Husband Ought to Know* (Philadelphia: Vir Publishing Company, 1899), 52-3.
[256] Sayyid Bilgrāmī, *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* (Agra: Muhammad Ibrahim Khan Private Press, 1909), 19.
[257] Ibid., 15.

While sexual moderation and conjugal mutuality remain the main pillars of Stall's ideas in the first half of *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj*, Sayyid Bilgrāmī does not include Stall's expositions on physical problems such as impotency which could hamper marriage or Stall's concerns with addictions such as that of tobacco or liquor, or even a discussion of various sexual diseases in his text.

Stall begins the second section on the 'wife' with a discussion on the ignorance of women on the subject of sexuality. For Stall, the extensive preparations of the wedding along with this ignorance add to considerable stress of marriage and he advices men to be considerate to women especially immediately after marriage. Following Stall, Sayyid Bilgrāmī too warns his male readers against using force in post-marital sexual intercourse emphasizing instead patience and caution. Although Sayyid Bilgrāmī doesn't explicitly state the term consent, this stress on sexual restraint after marriage is the only censure of marital rape that I have encountered in the reformist Urdu literature so far. While there was an incessant focus on acquiring a woman's consent to marry in debates of the early twentieth century, there was a strong silence on issues of female sexual consent following marriage. Sayyid Bilgrāmī's emphasis on this point even as an import from Stall remains a unique feature in Urdu discourse on conjugality in early twentieth century.

Digressing from Stall, Sayyid Bilgrāmī in his discussion on wife's role in conjugality points to the role of 'Eastern' thinking in marital relations. According to Sayyid Bilgrāmī, for Eastern philosophers, there are three key traits in managing marital relations between husband and wife. The first involves awe where the husband should establish such dignity in the eyes of the wife that she should consider her benefits and losses based on his commands; the second involves magnanimity where the husband should provide that

support to his wife which becomes the basis of conjugal love and the third entails preoccupation with service where the wife should focus her attention on the management of the house and the care of her family.[258]

In addition to these qualities, Sayyid Bilgrāmī also mentions three features which he felt should be avoided in conjugal relations. The first was that husband should not display unrestraint love for his wife, the second was that he should not discuss any matter that could cause hostility between him and his wife, and the third was that he should avoid the company of women who enthrall men with stories of love.[259]

Sayyid Bilgrāmī's inclusion of characteristics that need to be cultivated as well as those elements that need to be avoided in the management of conjugality reveals the contradictions and inconsistencies in the text of *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* in particular and marriage advice manuals in general during this period. Although adopted from Stall, it wasn't unusual throughout the Urdu advice literature of the colonial period to stress emphasis on the mutual relations between husband and wife, on companionship as the fundamental dynamic of a couple and on rights belonging to both husband and wife. Simultaneously, much like Sayyid Bilgrāmī's schema of conjugal traits, there was also a preponderance of reformist arguments against classical literature on love, counsels that instructed wife to manage the household and remain obedient, even in awe, of the husband. The subject of the 'wife' that appears in Urdu print culture during the colonial period especially in advice manuals thus is an ambiguous one that seeks to both subvert earlier gender hierarchies and also re-establishes norms that placed women squarely within the mould of an unequal relation.

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[258] Ibid., 49-50.
[259] Ibid., 51.

The ambiguous subject of the wife in *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* isn't only constructed from Sayyid Bilgrāmī's own addition about the 'Eastern' views but also from Stall's orthodox views on sexuality and gender. For Stall, the great majority of women are devoid of sexual pleasure and their divine purpose for their greatest happiness and best health is child-rearing. [260] Appropriating these views on female sexuality, Sayyid Bilgrāmī reiterates his stance on obedience and domestic management, and venerates the home where the purpose of marriage is procreation and child rearing, which is fulfilled dutifully in the role of motherhood.[261] Endorsing this intent of Stall, Sayyid Bilgrāmī writes that "the natural outcome of love is marriage and the necessary outcome of marriage is the continuation of species." [262]

Another feature common between Stall and Sayyid Bilgrāmī in their section on the wife is the overarching stress on health and physiology. While Sayyid Bilgrāmī ignores illustration of biological processes from the section on the husband, he discusses the process of fertilization and pregnancy in detail particularly the counsels regarding diet, exercise and health prior to childbirth. [263] Sayyid Bilgrāmī also elaborates the connection between heredity, health and marriageable age. Opposing young marriage for women, he argues that when young girls are forced into marriage, their physiology cannot support child bearing and consequently the children inherit their incapacities. According to

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[260] Sylvanus Stall, *What a Young Husband Ought to Know* (Philadelphia: Vir Publishing Company, 1899), 118-147.

[261] Sayyid Bilgrāmī, *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* (Agra: Muhammad Ibrahim Khan Private Press, 1909), 62-63.

[262] Ibid., 67.
[263] Ibid., 85-90.

Sayyid Bilgrāmī, the marriageable age in warm countries for women should be 16 and for men should be 21. [264]

In general, both Stall and Sayyid Bilgrāmī share the belief that marriage characterized by sexual restraint or socially acceptable sexual behavior is the essential component of exemplary character and good living in which the happy, useful or the reformed life serve to raise healthy, strong children. Despite this common thread running through the two texts, it is necessary to point out that *What a Husband Ought to Know* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* were composed in different languages by authors hailing from distinct cultural backgrounds and addressed themselves to very different audiences. The fundamental motivation for Stall in publishing the *Sex and the Self* series was not merely regulation of sexuality and enforcement of gendered hierarchies but the construction of a Christian identity within the crucible of family. Laden with illustrations from Scripture, *What a Husband Ought to Know* is a text aimed at religious conversion in which the publication of the entire *Sex and the Self* series can be associated with evangelical activity and is imbricated in trans-national networks of Christian missionaries engaged in proselytization. What is remarkable about *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj,* especially given Sayyid Bilgrāmī's own interest in Islamic culture and history is that it desists almost completely from employing religious sources in its argument. There are no supporting quotations from the Qurān, the Hadith or philosophers like Al-Ghazali, who was cited often in the modern discussion on conjugality. Even more extraordinary is the absence of any demands of piety in the life of a 'good' husband or wife. For a text produced specifically

[264] Ibid., 73-4.

for an Indian Muslim audience, these features are a unique departure from the Urdu reformist literature of the colonial period.

But how does the text correspond with the Urdu reformist literature of the colonial period? I argue that it resonates with the larger discourse on marriage and family through its language particularly in its emphasis on cultural categories established in Urdu literary etiquette. The two terms which mark Sayyid Bilgrāmī's approach to conjugality are *tahzīb* or culture and *tamaddun* or civilization. Sayyid Bilgrāmī says that *tahzīb* and *tamaddun* are the products of the union achieved between two individuals in marriage. [265] Considered virtues of self-refinement, both *tahzīb* and *tamaddun* were lynchpins on which reformist discourse articulated its claims in the colonial period. Translated as 'manners,' 'politeness' or 'refinement', *tahzīb* also carries associated meanings of education and culture, which acquired great stress in Muslim colonial socio-religious movements. Upon his return from England, for example, Sayyid Ahmad Khan started his journal *Tahzīb-ul Akhlāq* ('The Training of Etiquette' or 'The Social Reformer') and one of the first journals devoted to the cause of women's education was titled *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* (Culture of Women). Similarly, *tamaddun* translated as civilization, urbanism and sometimes culture was evoked repeatedly where ideas associated with reform could restore and rejuvenate *tamaddun* or civilization.

Falsafah-yi Izdivāj received favorable reviews and was endorsed by several writers and reformers in the Muslim community. Hālī called the publication of the book a favor for the community (*qaum*) and the country *(mulk)* and felt that every single as well as

[265] Ibid., 14-15.

married individual should read the book again and again, to follow all its counsels.[266] Muhibb-i Husain, editor of *Mualim-i Nisvān* said that the book wasn't just a translation but a much-needed compilation composed after careful deliberation. [267] Shad Azīmabādī wrote that the book was as necessary as the institution of marriage and wished that people would read the book with care and act on its generous counsels. [268] Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavī praised Sayyid Bilgrāmī for paying attention to the social conditions of Muslims and for providing an easy and simple method for reform. [269]

Following our analysis, it is evident that *Hidāyat-un-nissā* and *Rafīq-i Arūs* contain similarities and are both very different from *Islāh-i Hayāt* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj*. The texts composed by women are markedly less liberal in their approach to conjugality and the advice they offer to women. Muhammadī Begum warns her young female readers that the real age of freedom was before marriage, during childhood, and that the age after marriage is one of restriction. Elaborating her point to include everyone, she says that

> there is no age of freedom for anyone in the world. Neither for men nor for women. The age of childhood has not been counted as a time of humanity. During those years, nothing counts as sin and nothing is a divine reward. The actual human life is one of restriction only. And whosoever obeys this restriction with humanity will achieve the same standard of humanist excellence. [270]

In a similar vein, Muhammad-un-nissā also had a tough and disciplined approach to the duties of women, and largely left men out of her discussion. On the other hand, despite

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[266] Ibid., 1
[267] Ibid., 8
[268] Ibid., 11-12
[269] Ibid., 6.
[270] Muhammadī Begum, *Rafīq-i Arūs* (Lahore: Rifah-e Aam, 1906), 6.

their emphasis on sexual moderation and even chastity, Muhammad Abdulqādir and Sayyid Alī Bilgrāmī addressed sexuality, an issue on which the women remained silent, and both Abdulqādir and Sayyid Bilgrāmī maintained a more balanced approach for both men and women.

There are nevertheless aspects of Muhammad-un-nissā and Muhammadī Begum's writings that are favorable to women's conditions of living. Despite their treatment of sexuality in conjugal relations, what is remarkable in texts of *Islāh-i Hayāt* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* is their ignorance of specific conditions that affected women when they began their married life. There is simply no discussion of the burden of the husband's family and compatibility seems to be disconnected from any reflection on conditions of Indian families, such as the presence of an extended family or that of a second wife. *Islāh-i Hayāt* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* thus remain models of conjugal utopia that cannot practically address the problems of married men and women.

At a more general level, the publication of *Islāh-i Hayāt, Hidāyat-un-nissā, Rafīq-i Arūs* and *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* signify that conjugality amongst Muslims had emerged as an important autonomous question by late nineteenth century informed by other important developments such as the Age of Consent Bill and that these publications effectively introduced the idea of publicly managing and disciplining intimate issues including those of sexuality, marital incompatibility or parenting to achieve happiness and familial harmony. In the next chapter, we will examine how the reformist desire for concord and agreement in the family was contingent on how and more importantly to whom family members arranged marriages. Marriages without consent were deemed inappropriate although how consent was to be acquired could not be settled and remained unclear.

Similarly, representations of ‘respectable’ marriage appeared in novels authored by women, which carried critiques of ‘bad husbands’ and glorified ‘good wives.’

Chapter 3: 'Respectable' Conjugality

In the previous chapter, I discussed how conjugality was idealized and how intimacy was domesticated to the conjugal form in some texts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As we saw, a successful marriage was partly predicated on specific roles for men and women that were based on notions of sexual difference. In the writings of Muhammad-un-nissā and Muhammadī Begum, these roles constructed a strong gendered ideology of female obedience to male authority. The issues that all these texts raised regarding the management of family relationships, choice, consent and education also found their expression in women's magazines of *Ismat* and *Tahzīb-i Nisvān*, in novels and became focal points in how marriages were imagined and arranged in the community.

Ismat and *Tahzīb-I Nisvān* were the most well known Urdu women's journals from North India. Rāshid-ul Khairī started *Ismat* in 1908 in Delhi and *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* was started in 1898 in Lahore by Sayyid Mumtāz Alī. These magazines carried different kinds of writings directed at female readership that contained information about topics like health, childcare, recipes, domesticity and nutrition. In addition to basic information about the household, these magazines were also a dynamic space for a discussion of reformist issues particularly women's education, family and marriage.[271] The issues discussed in the previous chapter involving consent, choice, education were also found in *Ismat* and *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and will be discussed in this chapter. As an important point of difference from the last chapter, I will analyze here several novels by women that were

[271] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 105-157.

published in early twentieth century, which discussed marital and familial issues. While the late nineteenth century only had Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī as prominent Urdu novelists, the twentieth century witnessed several women taking up the pen to write about their concerns using the genre of the novel.

Consent

Notions of 'suitability' and marital compatibility were the central concerns in issues of consent and forced marriages. In 1910, Rāshid-ul Khairī (Khairī from here), editor of *Ismat,* identified two types of non-consensual marriages prevalent in Muslim society. The first included those in which the parents were aware that their children were clearly opposed to their marriage but still forced them into it, and the second involved those where the parents did not give the bride and the groom an open opportunity to become familiar with each other. Dismissing the first as unacceptable, Khairī called such parents inhuman and conjectured that they made up only 10% of the total marriages in the Muslim community. The second category of marriages that did not involve any pre-marital familiarity, Khairī felt, was the norm in Indian families and constituted the majority of non-consensual marriages. [272]

Elaborating upon the second category of marriages, Khairī writes that expecting the bride and the groom to have an opinion of each other is like asking what someone thinks about their dead grand parents. They cannot meet them but know them vicariously through their elder relatives who knew them intimately. In other words, for Khairī, consensual marriages did not involve any direct interaction between men and women

[272] Rāshid-ul Khairī. "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," (Marriage without Consent) *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 5 (November 1910): 4.

prior to marriage. Rather those matches in which the bride or the groom expressed agreement that of friends and family about the suggested spouse constituted consent. [273]

Continuing the debate further in the next issue of the journal, Khairī, posed two questions to his readers that he felt determined the issue of consent. The first question was whether the silence of children instead of a categorical rejection of parental choice constituted consent, and second was whether it was a legitimate marriage if one gave greater weight to opinions of friends and family instead of independent opinions of bride and groom. [274] On the first question, Khairī clearly states that silence does not imply consent and that the parents must seek consent explicitly. [275]

Regarding his second question, Khairī points out that those who support such marriages want to gradually abolish *purdah* or the practice of gender segregation be gradually in society, and wish that eventually men and women interact freely. According to Khairī, 25% of the Muslim community was advocating this position whereas the rest were supportive of *purdah*. He writes that those who consider *purdah* an instrument of oppression could act on their opinion, become familiar with each other's temperaments before their marriage and if they found each other agreeable, they could proceed to marry. On the other hand, Khairī says that those who felt that *purdah* was divinely ordained were a problem and they could only form an opinion based on the views of

[273] Ibid., 5.
[274] Rāshid-ul Khairī, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 6 (December 1910): 3.
[275] Ibid., 9.

others particularly because common sense suggests that those with experience, that is elders, would know better than those who were younger. [276]

According to Khairī, the issue of consent in marriage was not one of choice but of *purdah* and segregation. It is important to note here that while Khairī did not explicitly criticize opinions of those who wished that there be contact before marriages, there are suggestions that he may have censored any writing that expressed such an opinion. He specifically, for instance, mentioned that all solutions suggested for tackling the problem of forceful marriages were such that not only would he reject them for publication, he would not even "let 'respectable' girls hear an iota of it."[277]

Khairī's strong views about what could be publish and what women could 'hear' clearly attests that the ideas associated with social reform such as marital consent were tied inextricably to conventions of 'respectability' or *sharāfat,* and that even when there were occasions for discussion, it wasn't possible to subvert those conventions. What is more crucial here historically is that Khairī's rejection of possible articles that offended his *sharīf* sensibility suggests that such were prevalent and that women's magazines contain silences that excludes important opinion.

Besides raising the issue of gender segregation, Khairī also questions if consensual marriages contributed to greater amity and friendship in marriages. He says that one needed to compare the outcome of 90% of non-consensual marriages in India that were the norm with those of consensual ones to see if consent solved the problem of

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[276] Rāshid-ul Khairī. "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 5 (November 1910): 4.

[277] Rāshid-ul Khairī. "Nā razā mandī ki shādī," *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 5 (November 1910): 3.

acrimonious relationships. According to Khairī, if consent did not alleviate tensions in a conjugal relationship, it was not an important question. [278] Thus the aim of familial harmony was underlying factor in attributing significance to issues and opening them for discussion.

Khairī's discussion about consent illustrates that his understanding of the concept contravenes fundamental ideas associated with its practice. Thus, while he seemed to approve that men and women could meet each other and to marry on their own terms if they were opposed to *purdah,* he also identified familial opinion as crucial in a consensual marriage. Indeed in most circumstances, due to the custom of *purdah* in early twentieth century, men and women could not know each other independently and consent had to carry pre-dominantly meanings of familial suitability and not individual compatibility. This consent was not based on beliefs of privacy and individuality but located squarely within the frame of Indian society and did not radically transgress social norms. More importantly, what underlay the issue of consent in marriages was the institution of *purdah* and associated ideas of female modesty.

The space of women's magazines included opinions not just by editors or major reformers but also lesser-known individuals who engaged in public conversation and added diversity of opinion to any debate. The nature of writing in Urdu magazines was contentious and their pages witnessed back and forth arguments and disagreements on education, marriages, domesticity and family. Unlike Khairī's views on consent, some writers, for instance, openly questioned the very legitimacy of a non-consensual marriage. Lamenting that it was usual to disregard consent, Muhammad Shaukat Husain

[278] Rāshid-ul Khairī, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 6(December 1910): 5.

from Badayun angrily wrote that even if it wasn't possible to know the views of the bride, the priest should in such scenarios at least separately inform the groom that "you idiot, I have come to break your neck on the command of your oppressive parents. Do you or do you not also agree to gladly give your life."[279] Speaking more from the perspective of the groom, he writes that if elder members of the family protest about the lack of consent, parents might be willing to listen but if a young man gives his opinion, all hell breaks loose upon him.

Expressing the groom's predicament, Muhammad Shaukat Husain says that the mother of the young man insists that marriage is not a child's business and the father is unable to resolve the tension between mother and son, and is caught in a dilemma. He can't break the match because that would invite hate from the girl's family and if he proceeds, it would violate his son's choice. In most cases, such fathers simply become silent. As for young brides, he admits that they are in worse situation than men and have much less opportunity for any disagreement with their parents.[280]

Disagreeing with Muhammad Shaukat Husain, another respondent replied that it was unfair to blame parents for lack of compatibility. Parents usually wished well for their children and attempt only those proposals, which they felt were compatible. Based on this assumption, the writer says that there can be only two cases of non-consensual marriages. The first was the one in which the parents followed earlier conventions and their daughter wasn't educated whereas the groom was, causing complaints from the young man. The second one included cases where parents cruelly arranged marriages simply for money,

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[279] Muhammad Shaukat Husain Badayun, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* Vol. 13 No. 22 (28 May 1910): 253. *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* will be *TN* from here.
[280] Ibid., 254-55.

which the author judged unacceptable. The writer called upon Muhammad Shaukat Husain to clarify his views on consent insisting that marriages where men and women meet before their marriage followed English culture and would never be acceptable to Indian Muslims. [281]

In his response, Muhammad Shaukat Husain wrote that non-consensual marriages were more prevalent amongst Muslims because they often married within the family. For Muhammad Shaukat Hussain, this often involves ignoring the choice and opinion of the groom. Mentioning one such case, he says that the groom wished to marry someone not approved by his mother but the mother wanted him to marry a young girl in the family, whose parents had considerable wealth. The groom expressed his disapproval of the arrangement through his friends, following which his mother threatened to sever all relations with him. Muhammad Shaukat Husain says that the groom arrived at his home and detailed his predicament. Shaukat Husain along with other members of the family tried to reconcile views between mother and son but the son had to succumb to his mother's choice. [282]

Muhammad Shaukat Husain calls upon men and women in the Muslim community to take a courageous stand against forced marriages and to stop them whenever they are witnessed amongst friends or family, without fear of gossip and social opprobrium. In his argument for such position, he writes:

> If we really want to progress, our internal reform is most necessary. No building becomes durable if its foundation is not made firm. No regime can be imagined

[281] V.H "Nā razā mandī kī shādī," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 31 (30 July 1910): 366-67.
[282] Muhammad Shaukat Husain, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī, number 2," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 36 (3 September 1910): 428-29.

> powerful if it doesn't have internal peace. Similarly no community can progress if its civilization/culture (*tamaddun)* is in decay. [283]

What we witness in Muhammad Shaukat Husain's argument is that the family becomes a foundational site for peaceful social relations and a necessity for restoration of *tamaddun* or civilization. Securing a consensual union free from coercion is a 'civilizing process,' which will rejuvenate culture and liberate it from atrophy and decline.

In addition to *tamaddun,* the concept of *khud-mukhtārī* (self-empowered) also appears in the discourse on consensual marriages. *Mukhtār* refers to a constellation of meanings such as agency, empowerment, authority and free will. To become *khud-mukhtār* thus is to exercise free-will, agency and authority as a self-determining individual. An illustration of another article submitted to *Tahzib-e Niswan* will highlight the concept of *khud-mukhtār* and its relationship to consent. In a story of non-consensual marriage, a young man Yusuf is forced to marry according to his mother's wishes. When his paternal aunt, who supports Yusuf, discusses the matter with Yusuf's mother, the mother says in her defense that "as long as the children do not become self-sovereign and as long as the parents are alive, the parents have every right to decide for the children, and it is the duty of children to follow the command of their parents." [284] Thus, the process of separation from the parents and an autonomy in decision making as an adult instead of a child informed who was *khud-mukhtar,* and marriage was one of the most important decisions, which determined transition to *khud-mukhtārī* and adulthood. The aim of familial reform, in questions of consent and choice, thus was to ensure a particularly self-sovereign claim

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[283] Muhammad Shaukat Husain, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī, number 4," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 50 (10 December 1910): 596.
[284] Muhammad Shaukat Husain, "Nā razā mandī kī shādī, number 3," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 5 (5 November 1910): 531.

to adulthood at marriage and also direct the ire towards child marriage where consent could not be sought. [285]

In addition to male voices like Rāshid-ul Khairī and Muhammad Shaukat Husain, women also submitted stories to emphasize the dangers of forced marriages. One woman, Maimunā, complained that in some cases, woman's consent is not even sought as a token but that during the *nikāh* ceremony, elder women from the *zenānā* quarters simply say yes on behalf of the bride, assuming that the priest's question is only a formality and does not need to be posed directly to the bride. [286] The writer also noted that given that non-consensual marriages had become the norm nowadays, it was the responsibility of the priest to ensure that consent had been given by all the parties involved, and only then should he proceed with the *nikāh* ceremony. In one story, a man named Muzaffar Alī Khan employed as a judge in Allahabad was forced to marry a young girl, Mahmūdah, who was only fifteen. [287] The writer maintained that although Mahmūdah had all the traits of a 'good wife,' her marriage was a painful experience. One year after her marriage, Muzaffar Alī Khan had a second polygynous marriage. Mahmūdah died four years after her marriage at the age of nineteen. [288]

Related to consent was the issue of secrecy or keeping the arrangement of the marriage secret from the bride and the groom. Secrecy often meant that parents hurriedly arranged the marriage and that the opinion of bride, groom and other family members weren't

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[285] Muhammad Gaur, "bachpan kī shādī," (Child Marriage) *TN* Vol. 17 No. 10 (March 1914): 115-117; Sālihah Khatūn, "bachpan kī nisbat," (Child Marriage) *TN* Vol. 35 No. 30 (23 July 1923): 710-14.
[286] Maimunā, "zabardastī kī shādī," (Forced Marriage) *TN* Vol. 13 No. 43 (22 October 1910): 505.
[287] Maimunā, "zabardasti kī shādī," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 41 (8 October 1910): 485-87.
[288] Maimunā, "zabardastī kī shādī," *TN* Vol. 13 No. 43 (22 October 1910): 506.

considered. In one such instance of secrecy, the bride's family discovered on the day of marriage that the groom was a sixty year old man. Despite protestations from family members as well as the girl, the parents went ahead with the wedding because it was too late to break the match without public disgrace of the bride's family. [289]

Women commentators also emphasized that non-consensual marriage was an issue specific to their condition. Protesting that marriage of women was considered a mere play of dolls for some parents, one wrote that "alas, only God knows that in this age, we unfortunate girls are disgraced. Like a voiceless wild bird captured and locked up in a cage, no one treats us with any respect."[290]

Some women argued for consent but also warned against the possibility of 'excessive freedom.' One Shafia Begum expressed despair that women who assume a role in their marriage are considered shameless, and hoped that they could at least talk freely about their marriage with their parents. She also that added nevertheless that she didn't wish that they be given so much freedom that "they start courtship like the Western sisters, for our society is completely different from Western culture." [291] In response to this piece, the manager of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* wrote that all articles on consensual marriage written in the magazine had a similar emphasis and that "no one wants complete freedom and an imitation of British fashions. Nor has any article advocating such complete freedom ever been published in the journal." [292] The views of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* here correspond closely

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[289] Muhammad Fātima, "kam aql kī shādī," (An Unwise Marriage) *Ismat* Vol. 14 No. 1 (January 1915): 52-54.
[290] Saqia Khātūn, "be-marzī kī shādī," (Marriage without Consent) *Ismat* Vol. 11 No. 4 (September 1913): 26-7.
[291] Shafia Begum, "ladkiyon kī be-marzī shādī karnā," (Conducting Marriage of Girls without Consent) *TN* Vol. 17 No. 22 (30 May 1914): 265.
[292] Ibid., 265.

with Rāshid-ul Khairī where any view suggesting open pre-marital consent between men and women could not be published. Thus, the issue of consent was the site on which claims about 'Indian Muslim woman' and 'Western woman' were navigated, and boundaries about acceptable and 'respectable' behavior established.

Rāshid-ul Khairī had touched upon the necessity of loosening of *purdah* norms in arranging consensual marriages. While open interaction between men and women wasn't explicitly described as desirable, women by the mid-twenties discussed the possibility of an epistolary friendship between fiancé and fiancée after their engagement and before their marriage, to better understand the family and personalities of future spouses. Women sometimes presented imaginary sample letters that could be written by the fiancée to her fiancé and his response to her queries. Khadīja-ul Akbarī, a regular contributor to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* from Bareilly, composed such a letter which enquired about the fiancé's employment, his relations with his parents and siblings and general attitude towards women, particularly daughters-in-law in the household. Specifically, the fiancée asked how her fiancé would cope with disagreements with his parents, if she would be able to go outside freely and if she could interrupt her household responsibilities with study or leisure. Finally, the fiancée also asked for a photograph and wished that they could have met and that she was writing with permission from her parents. [293]

What is striking about Khadīja-ul Akbarī's column is that the letters of both fiancée and fiancé portray them to be an educated, compatible couple generated in the reformist image. The fiancé responds appreciating his fiancée's audacity, assures her that his

[293] Khadīja-ul Akbarī, "mangetar se khat o kitābat," (Letter writing with Fiancé) *TN* Vol. 30 No. 16 (16 April 1927): 397-98.

parents would live separately from them and that she would be independently in charge of her house and her life. [294] It is important to note that the fiancée's letter was not especially loving or even affectionate but purely an enquiry into his background with special attention on his views about women's role and their education. Instead of establishing love between fiancé and fiancée, the letter turns the concerns of parents or elder members of the family into a woman's initiative, establishing consent and not necessarily love as basis of 'reformed' marriage.

Khadīja-ul Akbarī's approach to acquiring consent was criticized by Nazr Sajjād Hyder, Zafar Jahān Begum and Sughrā Humāyun Mirzā. According to Nazr Sajjād Hyder, the questions of the letter were childish and there was no guarantee that fiancé would respond to them with truth or sincerity. She also added that all the queries contained in the fiancée's letter were too late if conducted after the engagement and should have been thought before the families committed to the engagement. [295] Zafar Jahān Begum expressed similar views, arguing that before marriage, men and women hid their flaws and highlighted only their strengths, which would make it difficult to determine anything about the groom or bride with veracity. More importantly, she mentioned that if the engagement was broken for any serious reason, it was the fiancée who suffered the most because it would be nearly impossible to arrange a match elsewhere as the woman would acquire a reputation for being demanding or difficult. [296]

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[294] Ibid., 398-399.
[295] Nazr Sajjād Hyder, "mangetar se khat o kitābat," *Ismat* Vol. 38 No. 6 (June 1927): 405-07.
[296] Zafar Jahān Begum, "mangetar se khat o kitābat," *TN* Vol. 30 No. 22 (28 May 1927): 430-31.

Sughrā Humāyun Mirzā also intervened in the debate and supported the views of Nazr Sajjād Hyder. Like Zafar Jahān Begum, she felt that a broken engagement would be damaging for the woman, and letters did not determine anything that parents could not find out. On the whole, she considered marriage to be a gamble in which even a long term relationship before marriage could not guarantee its success. Thus one simply had to insist that when parents search for a groom for their daughter, they should to gather as much information as possible and should convey all that knowledge to the bride to acquire her consent. [297]

With Sughrā Humāyun Mirzā, Nazr Sajjād Hyder and Zafar Jahān Begum all contravening Khadīja-ul Akbarī's claims of achieving consent through letter writing, the discussion was essentially shifted towards consent sans letter writing. Even those who endorsed the exchange of letters between fiancé and fiancée argued that it served its purpose well only when the spouse had been suitably selected and the groom could be trusted completely to begin a reciprocal relationship before marriage. Therefore, the selection of spouse was the central issue and care had to be taken by the family to ensure that the groom was serious about his education and that his family emphasized good manners.[298] Consent thus led to worries of incompatibility, which found expression in journals and more vividly in novels.

Narratives of Incompatibility

While the debates on consent aimed to pave the way for the person one could marry, the discourse of compatibility explored the tricky terrain of causes, explanations and

[297] Sughrā Humāyun Mirzā, "mangetar se khat o kitābat," *Ismat* Vol. 39 No. 2 (August 1927): 115-117.
[298] Razia Khātūn, "mangetar se khat o kitābat," *Ismat* Vol. 39 No. 3 (September 1927): 195-98.

conflicts over rejection or acceptance of a spouse or more appropriately a family. Not surprisingly, it was also the site of the 'idealisation' of marriage where images of an 'ideal conjugal relationship' including the 'good' wife or the 'perfect husband' were expressed.

Advice literature in the late nineteenth century by reformers like Nazīr Ahmad and Muhammad un-nissā had already constructed visions of the 'ideal' wife and husband but these illustrations acquired a new life during the twentieth century. Novels written mostly by women co-opted these unreal figures of perfection and employed them to demonstrate and discuss conditions of animosity, distrust, cruelty and lack of friendship in family relationships. Advice on whom to marry, how, when and why were implicit in these narratives and its authors expressed similar opinions in articles published in Urdu women's journals. These novels may or may not reflect actual social practices but I hope to illustrate that when read in conjunction with journal articles, they constitute the same discursive universe of familial reform and thus reflect processes of wider social transformation.

Journals routinely carried instructions for women to be obedient to their husbands, understand their temperament, to treat their in-laws and the husband's family as their own. [299] Sometimes counsels were directed towards both husband and wife calling them to be honest and truthful to each other. [300] Two earliest novels by women that addressed marital incompatibility in the twentieth century were Abbasī Begum's *Zehrā Begum* and

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[299] Mrs. Aga Y. Alī "shauhar kī ata'at," (Obedience to the Husband) *Ismat* Vol. 3 No. 2 (August 1909): 40-42; Mrs. Muhammad Ikrām, "acchī bīwī," (Good Wife) *Ismat* Vol. 2 No. 7 (July 1909): 6-8; Syeda Khātūn "phuphī kī nasīhat rukhsatī key waqt," (The advice of aunt at *rukhsatī*) *Ismat* Vol. 11 No. 2 (July 1913): 52-56.

[300] Validā Mustafā Ashraf, "bīwīyan shauharaun ko kis tarah khush rakh saktī hain," (How can Wives keep Husbands Happy) *Ismat* Vol. 7 No. 5 (November 1911): 2-15.

Nazr Sajjād Hyder's *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum.* Hailing from Madras, Abbasī Begum is the mother of writer Hijāb Imtiaz Alī and wrote articles and short stories frequently in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat.*[301] *Zehrā Begum* first made its public appearance in 1914 as a serialized novel in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān.* The chief protagonist Zehrā is born to a noble family in Delhi and her father Mīr saheb is counted amongst the elite of the city. His influence had waned dramatically after the revolt of 1857 but he remains known amongst the prominent families of the city. Mīr saheb is an ardent supporter of women's education and Zehrā receives education not only at home with the assistance of a private governess but also in school. Zehrā's elder brother and only other sibling, Sayyid Saghīr Alī (Saghīr) takes enormous interest in his sister's education and follows her progress as a student. Unlike Mīr saheb and Saghīr, Zehrā's mother remains unconcerned and even suspicious of her daughter's learning but her opinions had become relatively unimportant in the household due to Mīr saheb's and Saghīr's encouragement of Zehrā's education. Nevertheless, she often worried that her daughter, despite being well-mannered and perfectly obedient to her wishes, was not in her control and might come to share the views of her father and brother instead of her own. [302]

Portrayed as the 'good woman' in the novel, Zehrā's characteristics highlight the extent to which education had come to be idealized within the emerging world of Urdu female literati. Zehrā is the educated 'good woman' whereas her mother and older women belong to a world where women's education isn't valued. Chatting with other older women in the neighborhood, Zehrā's mother complains that her daughter, unlike the

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[301] Abbasī Begum, "Hurriyat-i Nisvān," (Freedom of Women) *TN* Vol. 17 No. 38 (19 September 1914): 451-53; Abbasī Begum, "hamārī talīmī hālat," (The Status of our Education) *TN* Vol. 17 No. 52 (26 December 1914): 626-28.
[302] Abbasī Begum, *Zehrā Begum* (Lahore: Dar-ul Aa'shat Punjab, 1934): 7, 26.

daughters of other elite families, had never showed any excitement in owning precious jewelry or heavily ornate clothes. Lamenting that she instead remains obsessed with books, her mother says that "whenever we heard anything, it was always about those rotten books, about the desire to have one or two libraries, about subscribing to the latest journal that had been released, about buying newspapers, about building shelves for her books or her endless praise for her teachers."[303] In addition to her general reading, Zehrā also develops interest in medicine and has a collection of medical texts. [304]The construction of an idealized educated female subject also appears in other writers including Nazr Sajjād Hyder, Zafar Jahān Begum, Khātūn Akram and Jamīlā Begum. Much like Nazīr Ahmad and Hālī, female novelists too placed central significance on education but a crucial point of departure in their novels is that an incompatible marriage either blocks the character's education or abuses the virtues acquired through education

Zehrā Begum gives an account of two marriages of two siblings, one presenting a compatible marriage involving Saghīr, who is successful and idealized in the novel, while that of his sister Zehrā is an incompatible one, forced upon her by their mother, which ruins Zehrā's life and destroys their family. After completing his B.A, Saghīr studies law in England. Saghīr's marriage doesn't involve any intervention by his mother. Instead, Miss Nelson, Zehrā's schoolteacher, mediates the match and Saghīr gets married to Khujista Begum, daughter of Shaukat who is also a teacher and a colleague of Miss Nelson at Zehrā's school. As the daughter of a schoolteacher, Khujista is well educated and perfectly matched to barrister Saghīr. [305] Abbasī Begum briefly comments on Saghīr

[303] Ibid., 9.
[304] Ibid., 34.
[305] Ibid., 39-40.

and Khujista presenting them as an 'ideal' portrait of a companionate couple. She says that "it is our wish that every educated man should marry such an educated wife and that all parents should raise their daughters like Khujista." [306]

While completing his BA in England, Saghīr befriends Salīm, Khujista's brother, who is also pursuing a degree in law. Shaukat secretly desires that her son Salīm be married to Zehrā but Zehrā's mother has other plans for her daughter's wedding. She instead suggests Nawāb Qaisar Jung, a wealthy 60-year-old widower, who owns considerable property in the villages and has children and grand-children. Upon hearing of the proposal, Saghīr, Khujista and Mīr saheb all object to the match but Zehrā's mother remains firm saying that "days spent in sweat and toil like that of Saleem with a mere 300 or 400 per month is no life at all" and that "Qaisar can provide a mansion with several servants for Zehrā where she won't have to work and can therefore live in luxury." [307]

Besides the promise of a comfortable life, Zehrā's mother insistence on Qaisar Jung is also driven by her desire to limit 'westernized' views in her family. Referring to Saghīr's choice for Zehrā condescendingly as '*firangī,'* she insists that she would rather have Zehrā not ever marry than have a son-in-law who shares Saghīr's views. [308] Moreover, she feels that the educated women that Sagheer prefers behave arrogantly like *memsahib,* speak English, interact openly with other British women or are always reading and sending articles to journals. [309]

The clash between Saghīr and his mother contains the key features of the debate on conjugality, family and social life of Muslims, which was brewing in women's journals

[306] Ibid., 70.
[307] Ibid., 79.
[308] Ibid., 74.
[309] Ibid., 73.

during the early twentieth century. Firstly, the disdain that Zehrā's and Saghīr's mother demonstrates towards employment and a meager salary suggest that these debates transpired, in no small measure, due to the emergence of a professional middle class amongst Indians in general and Muslims in particular. Secondly and more importantly, it illustrates that the crucial features of this emerging Muslim professional middle class were characterized not just by salaried employment but also by a distinct sense of cultural and social values. To counteract the reasoning of his mother in considering Zehrā's marriage, Saghīr retorts that "we should also think of his (Nawāb Qaisar Jung's) manners of social life, thoughts, age and taste. What are we going to do just with money."[310] The key phrase in the novel, which encapsulates these values of compatibility is *tarz-i ma'ashirat* or life- style. Specifically, lifestyle included the whole framework of family's socio-cultural values and not just the financial standing or employment of the husband.

Amongst these social values was familiarity with practices perceived to be British or simply interaction with '*firangis'* on a regular basis in everyday life. Speaking in English, imitating fashions and dressing styles of English women or inviting them to one's house and forming friendships with them were all debated in women's journals during this period. There were, in particular, increasing attempts to ensure that British and Indian women interacted with each other so that, much like Indian men, Indian women could also reap benefits from their socialization.[311] Writers made suggestions on how to carry

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[310] Ibid., 73.

[311] Begum Mumtāz Khan sahiba, "European aur Hindustani Ladies kā Mel Jol," (The interaction between European and Indian Ladies) *Ismat* Vol. 1 No. 4 (September 1908): 3-4.

out proper introductions and general polite conversations with those of a different culture and directed it especially at women readers who had never interacted with strangers before.[312] In this regard, the emergence of female clubs in towns and cities was viewed as an important beginning step for shy women who would not otherwise invite English women to their homes.[313] More importantly, journal contributors felt that socialization with outsiders was not a consequence of education, but that education could be an outcome of such an interaction. Meeting not only English women but also those of other religious groups attenuated ignorance and increased self-respect. One Sultan Begum wrote that "as of now, except for good food and wearing the best jewels, we are completely unaware of any issue in the world." [314] She added that to meet European women, one "must learn self-respect" and that "we should have an attitude of equality in meeting them and treat them the way they treat us." By meeting them with self-respect, "our esteem would increase in their eyes."[315]

The second issue, which Abbasī Begum repeatedly alludes to is the emphasis on plain clothes and rejection of heavy jewelry and especially clothes especially those that restricted movement. It wasn't unusual for women writers to complain in journals that the 'new fashion' was a blind imitation of the European dress and more seriously that it signified lessening of *purdah* amongst young Muslim women. The critics of the 'new fashion' also denounced it for being expensive and accused its admirers of showing

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[312] Ibid., 5.
[313] Ibid., 6.
[314] Sultan Begum, "Angrezī aur Hindustanī begamāt kā mel jol,"(The interaction between English and Indian Women) *Ismat* Vol. 2 No. 2 (February 1909): 5.
[315] ibid., 6, 8.

off.[316] Others felt that concern over clothing was distracting women from qualities of primary importance including child-rearing and acquisition of manners.[317]

In the novel *Zehrā Begum,* Saghīr, Mīr saheb and Mrs. Nelson are all unable to prevent Zehrā's mother from arranging her marriage to Nawāb Qaisar Jung. Forced into marrying an old wealthy man, Zehrā also experiences tension with Nawāb Qaisar Jung's cousin and her sister-in-law, Mehr Afroz. Mehr Afroz continues to tease Zehrā for behaving like a '*mem'* and expresses confusion and bewilderment over her appearance and actions. At the wedding ceremony, she is astonished at Zehrā's refusal to wear heavy jewelry or even a nose-ring and says "who knows what other airs the 'new bride' of the 'new light' will display. Right now, it is only limited to the nose-ring. Once they get more education, God only knows what else they will abandon." [318]

Not surprisingly, Zehrā is unable to adjust to Qaisar Jung's mansion and feels alienated from its culture including the gossip of old fashioned servants and the attitude of her sister-in-law. Abbasī Begum further highlights the difference between the prescriptive ideal of women's education when Zehrā's daughter is born and she appoints, on the suggestion of Mrs. Nelson, a woman named Mary to take care of the baby. Mehr Afroz treats this gesture with disdain and scoffs at the idea of putting their family baby in the care of a Christian woman. While Zehrā is aware of the details of childcare and health of the baby, Mehr Afroz only expresses her ignorance.

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316 Mrs. Qutubuddīn Husain, "islahī new fashion," (Reformist New Fashion) *Ismat* Vol. 11 No. 3 (September 1913): 38-39.
317 Mehr Khātūn, "nīm tālīm aur nya fashion," (New Education and New Fashion) *TN* Vol. 16 No. 2 (11 January 1913): 21.
318 Abbasī Begum, *Zehrā Begum* (Lahore: Dar-ul Aa'shat Punjab, 1934): 108.

Eventually, the huge age difference between Qaisar Jung and Zehrā proves to be disastrous for the marriage, and Qaisar Jung dies leaving Zehrā to live the life of a widow. At his deathbed, however, he calls his marriage a mistake and wishes that she had married a young man, more suited to her temperament. Zehrā suffers profusely from grief and dies soon afterwards.

The familial issues that emerge after Qaisar Jung's death reveal Abbasī Begum's own outlook on them. As the news of Qaisar Jung's death spreads in the family, his children from previous marriages arrive to claim money. Zehra never meets them during her time with Qaisar Jung and they are isolated deliberately from her by Mehr Afroz. To confront them, Zehra's mother asks Sagheer to intervene as a lawyer and fight for his sister. In a surprising twist, Sagheer refuses to engage in any legal action saying that it would have been worthwhile only if Qaisar Jung had stipulated an amount for Zehra but legal action would only cause unnecessary tension for Zehra. [319]

Sagheer's disinterest in defending her sister's claim for money and inheritance is an unusual feature of the novel. When Zehra's mother asks Sagheer to intervene, Abbasi Begum portrayal of Zehra's mother desire for that financial stability for her daughter as greed proves that women writers felt that certain characteristics such as claims to inheritance could not be accepted and integrated into the mold of the 'good woman.' 'Writers thus aimed to produce role models for women that could challenge certain ways of living but were nevertheless constructions of upper middle class sensibility that did not entirely violate societal codes, inhabiting a safe yet somewhat subversive space.

[319] Ibid., 228-229.

Another crucial difference between Saghīr and Zehrā's mother is on the issue of widow remarriage. Zehrā's mother suggests that Zehrā be married to Munīr Jung, Qaisar Jung's younger brother. Astonished at this proposal, Saghīr says that it isn't Zehrā's temperament to remarry, that even if Zehrā were to remarry, Salīm would be a better choice and that if she genuinely cared for Zehrā's life, she should have never married her to Qaisar Jung in the first place. Here, Abbasī Begum remains ambiguous on widow remarriage neither allowing her 'ideal' protagonist to remarry nor erasing the possibility of whom she could, or more appropriately should remarry, if she did.

Other novels during this period also expressed similar concerns about marital incompatibility. Much like Abbasī Begum's *Zehrā Begum,* Nazr Sajjād Hyder's *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum* is also a tale of a bad marriage forced by parents who show little care or attention to the sentiments or temperament of children. An important difference in *Akhtar- un-nissā Begum,* however, is that the mother is a step-parent and the novel carries an implicit critique of male second marriages. Serialized in 1910 in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* Akhtar-un-nissā survives a lonely childhood, forceful marriage and widowhood to become a model of education, independence, and effort for the Muslim community. At the age of eight, Akhtar-un-nissā's mother passes away and her father, Rafīq Ahmad, sends her to Kanpur to study at a Girls boarding school. Within a few years, he remarries, and his second wife, Jaani Begum, is unable to form good relations with Akhtar-un-nissā. Jānī Begum also decides to raise her niece, Lādlī, whose mother had

similarly died, at her home and this also introduces a clash of affections over Akhtar-un-nissā and Lādlī within the family. [320]

Akhtar-un-nissā's support during her growing years comes from her maternal aunt, Mrs. Waqār Ahmad who lives in the same neighborhood. Unlike Jānī Begum, Mrs. Waqār Ahmad is an educated woman and also takes special care of her niece. Her four children including Akhtar Hasan, Qamar-un-nissā, Najam-un-nissā and Azhar Hasan have a special bond with Akhtar-un-nissā and she spends several hours at their home to escape the hostility of Lādlī and Jānī Begum. The eldest son, Akhtar Hasan, is studying at Aligarh College and not surprisingly, Mrs. Waqār Ahmad wishes that Akhtar-un-nissā and Akhtar Hasan should marry each other some day. With a boarding school education and the guidance of her aunt, Akhtar-un-nissā grows to be responsible and affectionate, embodying the virtues of a good education and effective child rearing whereas Lādlī remains envious of Akhtar-un-nissā and becomes ill tempered and stubborn.

But Jānī Begum arranges Akhtar-un-nissā's marriage elsewhere without her consent and her father is unable to put up any resistance. In *Zehrā Begum,* Zehrā was married to an old, wealthy man with no regard for education or employment. In *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum,* Akhtar-un-nissā is married to Zafar Alī, an ordinary employee working at a railway station. One of three brothers, he has not properly pursued his education and lives on poor income. When Akhtar-un-nissā and Zafar Alī start living together in Kanpur, their life is characterized by the routine hardships of penury. After her marriage, she also becomes distant and alienated from her cousins and her aunt, Mrs. Waqār Ahmad. A few

[320] Nazr Sajjād Hyder, "Akhtar-un-nissā Begum," in *Hawā-i Chaman mein Khema-i Gul,* ed. Qurratulain Hyder (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2004):114-123.

months after their marriage, an epidemic of cholera takes Zafar Alī's life and Akhtar-un-nissā is forced to live as a widow with her in-laws. [321]

For a brief period, Akhtar-un-nissā also lives with her brother-in-law Nisār Alī and his wife Sultānā in Lucknow when her in-laws travel to Mecca and Medina for the Hajj. In that duration, she discovers the cruelty of their disposition as they treat her like a poor distant cousin and burden her with all the chores of the house. [322]After her in-laws death, Akhtar-un-nissā decides to discontinue living with them and goes to the civil surgeon, who had attended to Zafar Alī, for advice. He and his wife suggest that she study further and chart her own life. Following this suggestion, Akhtar-un-nissā manages to scrape together some money from her savings and enrolls again in school. Earning a scholarship from the government, she completes her college education and immediately gets a job as an inspectress of schools in Calcutta. More importantly, she changes her name to Sitara Bai and adopts a Parsi identity because she fears retribution from the Muslim community over her education. [323] She eventually meets her cousins and father in Calcutta and after consulting them, decides to come to Aligarh and becomes the Head Mistress of Aligarh Girls School. [324]

Like Abbasī Begum's construction of Zehrā's marriage, Nazr Sajjād Hyder permits Akhtar-un-nissā very little time of marital companionship introducing widowhood early in her life. But, in contrast to Zehrā, Akhtar-un-nissā's widowhood becomes an opportunity to acquire higher education, enter the work force and gain financial security.

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[321] Ibid., 198-210.
[322] Ibid., 211-223.
[323] Ibid., 273-74.
[324] Ibid., 281.

In both *Zehrā Begum* and *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum,* a failed marriage particularly for women is engendered by the twin absences of consent and compatibility. The 'conjugal ideal' in *Akhtar- un-nissā Begum* is the marriage of Akhtar Hasan's sister Qamar- un-nissā with Khurshīd-ul Zaman (Khurshīd), a civil surgeon based in Agra. Educated in Aligarh and England, Khurshīd inherits no property since his father had spent all his money on his medical education. With his salary savings, he had managed a modest house in Agra and desired nothing more except commitment to his work. [325] Qamar-un-nissā, meanwhile, is able to impress her two sister-in-laws and they immediately invite her to their homes for dinner. Khurshīd is impressed that she likes to socialize and not stay at home because he felt that it matched well with the demands of his own profession. [326]

Both Abbasī Begum and Nazr Sajjād Hyder identify work-ethic and self-effort as central criteria in the portrait of an 'ideal husband.' If Nawāb Qaisar Jung lived an easy life of aristocratic inheritance and lacked modern education, Zafar Alī is punished with a tough life because his negligence of education results in a life of poverty. Neither man could qualify as suitable companions for their educated, well-mannered, *sharīf* wives. On the other hand, Saghīr who receives his education in England and becomes a lawyer is the 'good husband' in the successful marriage of Saghīr and Khujista in *Zehrā Begum.* Therefore, in all discourses of 'good wives' in the didactic novel, there was an accompanying image of the *sharīf* husband as well, and both husband and wife had to acquire characteristics of excellence to form the 'respectable conjugal dyad.' The marker of respectability within the discourse of social reform acquired a distinct focus on

[325] Ibid., 109.
[326] Ibid., 144-46.

diligence where 'good education' not only fashioned *adab* or manners in character and perfection of the self in husbands and wives but also advocated the benefits of work including responsibility and economic safety.

In addition to the respective qualities of the husband and wife, the performance of wedding ceremonies was also a key marker of difference between reformed and un-reformed individuals. Articles in *Ismat* and *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* continuously labeled rituals as un-Islamic, unnecessary and an expensive tradition and argued for their minimization.[327] In both *Zehrā Begum* and *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum,* various kinds of rituals and customs observed during the wedding are castigated repeatedly and an austere wedding with little expenses is idealized. Zehrā's mother much to the chagrin and anger of Saghīr and the rest of the family insists on carrying out various kinds of wedding rituals at Zehrā's wedding, which are absent at Saghīr's marriage. [328] At Khurshīd's wedding, a relative gives a short speech on reasons for the absence of ritual ceremonies saying that they wished to marry according to Sharia and that the money saved from a grand wedding would be given to educational funds in particular Aligarh College. [329]

Both *Zehrā Begum* and *Akhtar-un-nissā Begum* convey the 'conjugal ideal' for the *sharīf* Muslim community. The portraits of husband, wife, their respective families and their styles of living, the emphasis on consent and the narrow concerns of parents specially mothers, the specifically austere conduct of wedding sans any 'rituals' or

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[327] Bint Ata Muhammad Khan, "aik shādī kī taqrīb par,"(On the ceremony of one marriage) *Ismat* Vol. 5 No. 4 (October 1910): 24-30; Mrs. Muhammad ul-Haq, "shādī key mangharat masle," (The several problems of marriage) *Ismat* Vol. 14 No. 4 (April 1914): 25-6.

[328] Abbasī Begum, *Zehrā Begum,* 104.

[329] Nazr Sajjād Hyder, *Akhtar- un-nissā Begum,* 131.

ostentatious display of wealth all illustrate crucial ideas and issues advocated in the inter-connected print culture of women's journals and novels.

The social and cultural characteristics idealized in Urdu novels, nevertheless, did not go unnoticed and were criticized. One writer complained that there were three features, which she found most annoying in social novels written by young women. These were English fashion, usage of English words in speech and excessive freedom in affairs of marriage. Admitting that there were problems in the arrangement of marriages within the Muslim community, she insisted that turning against parental opinion or allowing single women to meet young men or write them letters was unacceptable and that it was necessary to start a journal where old, married women could express their views to counter the immaturity of young, inexperienced single women.[330]

By the mid twenties, more and more women supported education as an avenue to financial independence and emphasized the need to earn a living.[331] The insistence on women's labor and economic security also penetrated novels of incompatibility and further endorsed the work ethic as a mode of good living. In 1932, Zafar Jahān Begum from Barielly, a regular columnist in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat,* wrote her novel *Akhtarī Begum* which resolved marital incompatibility between husband and wife through an exclusive emphasis on work and labor. Akhtarī Begum is born to a Saidullāh Khan, son of Abdullāh Khan, in a financially modest family. Her mother passes away in the plague epidemic when she is only two and her father's second marriage does not beget good

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[330] Sultan Begum, "naya fashion," (New Fashion) *TN* Vol. 13 No.10 (5 March 1910): 114-115.

[331] Khadīja-ul Akbari, "vasail māsh musalmān ladkīyon key liye," (Financial Means for Muslim Girls) *TN* Vol. 28 No. 29 (18 July 1925): 457-59; V.A, "auratein kyā karen," (What should Women do) *TN* Vol. 28 No. 30 (25 July 1925): 481-82.

results for Akhtarī Begum. She is unable to develop good relations with her stepmother and becomes alienated from her father, finding solace in the company of her paternal grandfather, Abdullāh Khan. He also attends to Akhtarī's education and by the age of twelve, Akhtarī finishes the Qurān and can read and write in Urdu. But her immediate family ties to her father and stepmother remain weak and to make things worse, her father loses his job in a financial scandal and is unable to find better employment afterwards. The family comes to depend on the modest earnings of Akhtarī's stepmother, who sews and tailors clothes for other women. [332]

After the death of Abdullāh Khan, Akhtarī Begum resolves to take care of her paternal grandmother, her paternal aunt and her cousins financially through stitching. This responsibility places considerable burden on Akhtarī and she gradually withdraws from her education and schoolwork. When she turns fourteen, her paternal aunt begins to worry about marriage and initiates her search for a suitable boy. Despite Akhtarī's education and determined disposition, Zafar Jahān Begum indicates that the penurious conditions of the family made it harder to arrange her marriage to a well-employed groom. Worried further about losing her niece to an unknown family in a distant city, Akhtarī's aunt finalizes her match within the family to her much younger nephew and son of Abdullāh Khan's younger brother. [333]

In Zafar Jahān Begum's view, Akhtarī's husband wasn't an 'ideal' man and his biggest weaknesses were his love of change and his inability to stick permanently to one job for a long duration. The constant fluctuation in jobs often left him without any job for lengthy periods of time making him financially insecure and adding more trouble to Akhtarī's

[332] Zafar Jahān Begum, *Akhtarī Begum* (Lahore: Dar-ul Isha'at Punjab, 1932): 6-12.
[333] Ibid., 14-20.

poverty. Committed to earning well for the family, Akhtarī seeks advice from her teacher on how to improve her condition in life. She says that after days of careful consideration, she had concluded that she couldn't rely on other people to help her but had to do something on her own. Given her limited education, she wanted advice on what to do and how so that she could earn enough compensation for her efforts. [334]

Akhtarī's teacher praises her for her hard work and forbearance, and laments the state of women's paid work in the country. She says that the pay for a woman's hard work in the country was so little that it didn't even amount to an eighth of man's similar work. Criticizing the reformist leadership for ignoring ordinary skills such as stitching which constituted paid work for most widows, the teacher adds that "making fiery speeches on a platform, reading sermons about the community, touring the whole country in first class on community's charitable funds, in fact, globe trotting all the way to Europe, relishing rice and curry- all this is considered the necessary component of leadership." [335]

Zafar Jahān Begum's critique highlights a practical problem at the heart of reform. Most discourses involved advice columns, which constituted idealized visions of family particularly husband and wife. Unless professionally trained to work, the facility of reading the Qurān and writing letters in Urdu did not necessarily prepare for independence in cases of personal tragedy such as widowhood or economic contingencies of poverty. For self-sufficiency, it wasn't unusual for widows to support themselves only through stitching. Khadīja–ul Akbarī elaborated the difficulties involved in supporting oneself as a widow through stitching. Firstly, she said that those widows in *purdah* found it difficult to acquire enough sewing orders to support themselves. Secondly, with the

[334] Ibid., 41-2.
[335] Ibid., 44.

presence of well-trained male tailors in the city, competition had become fierce and survival of widows who took to sewing difficult. Finally, she claimed that most widows made hand-stitched clothes and those styles, compared to the machine-stitched, Western influenced clothes did not sell very well in the market. [336]In a personal note, she added that except for men's clothing, she, as a matter of principle, got all her clothes and those of the children stitched from widows but it upset her when a child of some poor widow arrived asking for orders for stitching and she (the author) had nothing to give. Khadīja-ul Akbarī's solution to the problem of such condition of widows was that women become financially independent and be trained to become professionals such a medical doctor or a teacher. [337]

Although Akhtarī doesn't resume her education to study medicine or become a teacher, her own teacher suggests that she continue to improve her skill and further learn machine-style sewing. Akhtarī dutifully follows this advice and her stitching orders increase by leaps and bounds allowing a steady and strong source of income. All this does not fail to impress her husband and he too resolves to self-improvement enrolling in an evening adult school and finding satisfaction in his current job. Gradually Akhtarī also opens a training facility for young women and girls in modern stitching. [338]

Akhtarī Begum concludes with the complete improvement of the husband's character and increasing prosperity for Akhtarī. On the suggestion of his wife, Akhtarī's husband leaves for Bombay to enroll in a tailoring course. While in Bombay, he also learns the skill of business and trade from different industries. Upon his return, he and Akhtarī

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[336] Khadīja-ul Akbarī, "auratein kyunkar zindagī basr karen," (How do Women Live) *TN* Vol. 28 No. 16 (18 April 1925): 246-7.
[337] Ibid., 248.
[338] Zafar Jahān Begum, *Akhtarī Begum,* 48-70.

refurnish their business and open a shop called Akhtar and Company. They continue to prosper and in a decade exit all conditions of poverty that plagued them in the early years of marriage. On the tenth anniversary of their business, the husband makes a speech praising his wife for directing him to the correct path of self-reliance. Claiming that there were far fewer number of clerical jobs in the colonial government than university graduate applicants, he also endorses industry and business as an alternate source of employment for young individuals and a necessary, stable economic force for family life. [339]

The predominance of entrepreneurship in Zafar Jahān Begum's imagination illustrates the increasing influence of socio-economic conditions on families after the first quarter of the twentieth century and the unreliability of inherited wealth to counter unforeseen financial challenges. It also demonstrates the extent to which the vision of an incompatible marriage came to be informed by the economic management of society, not only cultural norms of *tarz-i ma'ashrat* as seen in earlier novels like *Zehrā Begum and Akhtar-un-nissā Begum.* There is, for instance, no discussion of marriage rituals in *Akhtarī Begum* or any kind of socio-cultural discrepancy between Akhtarī and her husband over 'westernized' or '*hindustani'* ways of being. The husband remains polite and agreeable towards Akhtarī throughout the novel and is differentiated from Akhtarī only through his failure to earn a strong income. Zafar Jahān Begum advocated similar views endorsing attention to household and economic management even in her journal columns. [340]

[339] Ibid., 80-92.
[340] Zafar Jahān Begum, "hamārī ma'ashrat," (Our Society) *TN* Vol. 29 No. 47 (20 November 1926): 773-776.

Despite the strong didactic bent of most social novels, conjugality wasn't always imagined as a space for self-improvement. In 1935, Jamīlā Begum from Calcutta, another regular contributor to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat,* wrote her novel *Feroza,* which displayed ambiguity in defining family as a site for self-improvement for the husband along with the 'good' wife and 'bad' female character. Feroza is orphaned at a young age and arrives to live with her paternal uncle's family. Her paternal uncle, Jamshīd, is the legal guardian of Feroza after her parent's death and he receives 200 rupees every month from a trust to take care of her expenses. Feroza also inherits almost 50,000 from the sale of her father's factory and home, all of which is in the possession of Jamshīd and his wife. While she receives care and love in the initial years, gradually Feroza's aunt and Jamshīd's wife, is unable to resist the lure of money and routinely steals money from Feroza's share to attend to household expenses, particularly her son Shahab's medical education.[341]

When Feroza reaches her marriageable age, her aunt suggests that she be married to her son, Shahab. The proposal is appealing to everyone and they are soon engaged to each other. But before they could be married, their relationship runs into problems scuttling the possibility of a marriage. Surayyā, Mrs. Jamshīd's niece regularly visits their family and she falls in love with Shahab. When Mrs. Jamshīd discovers Surayyā's affection for Shahab, she wishes that Shahab and Surayyā marry each other instead of Shahab and Feroza but is unable to propose the match because she fears losing control over Feroza's money. Considering her to be obstacle but lured by her wealth, both Mrs. Jamshīd and Surayyā together try to alienate Feroza in the house. Shahab remains

[341] Jamīlā Begum, *Feroza* (Delhi: Ismat Book Depot, 1943): 1-15.

incapable of resolving the riddle because of his own love for Surayyā and Feroza's relations with her aunt, Surayyā and Shahab detoriarate even further. The stress also takes its toll on Mrs. Jamshīd who is eventually unable to cope and dies. [342]

After her aunt's death, Feroza discovers that Shahab still holds the same adulation for Surayyā. Worried about the state of her relationship and the outcome of her future marriage, she decides to abdicate her own relationship in favor of Surayyā and Shahab. In *Feroza,* Jamīlā Begum constructs a quasi-polygynous relationship between Surayyā, Shahab and Feroza. Although Feroza is never officially married to Shahab, even after her engagement to Shahab breaks, she continues to live in the same family with her paternal aunt and the married couple Shahab and Surayyā. Within the context of their quasi-polygynous triad, Jamīlā Begum follows a character schema similar to Akbarī Begum's *Godar kā Lāl* where the two wives portray the 'good' and 'bad' wife respectively. In the novel *Feroza,* Feroza emerges as the 'ideal' woman who sacrifices her own relationship to Surayyā while Surayyā emerges to become the character antagonistic to Feroza.

After their marriage, the reader discovers Surayyā's bad habits, the most significant of which is her reckless spending and her love of a luxurious life. More importantly, Surayyā simply doesn't waste money but desires continuous change and outings with no wish for the stability of domestic life. Feroza, on the other hand, remains modest and rooted in her bearing and unlike Surayyā, also attends closely to the needs of her aging uncle Jamshīd. The condemnation of Surayyā's rejection of domesticity for attractions outside the home such as cinema or visits to clubs illustrates the conservative fears of the

[342] Ibid., 23-33.

mobility and life beyond the confines of the home which women had begun to acquire in increasing measure by the 30s.

Surayyā's mannerisms do not go well with Shahab and he discovers his mistake in marrying Surayyā and rejecting Feroza. Moreover, Surayyā adopts a rude and mean-spirited attitude towards Feroza inheriting the personality and views of Mrs. Jamshīd. After much deliberation, Feroza decides to leave the house and comes to Lucknow to live with her maternal uncle. Her maternal uncle advises marriage but she refuses it completely. Instead she says that she wishes to devote her life to social service and the larger good of the Muslim community. She starts a girl's school in Lucknow and also opens special skill-based classes for widows and poor orphans. Meanwhile, Shahab's income is unable to support Surayyā's extravagant living and she leaves him too for another life. In the end, Shahab is left alone with modest income born out of an average education.

The twin representations of Feroza and Surayyā depict exaggerations of the educated 'new woman,' which had appeared ubiquitously in Urdu print literature by early twentieth century. The one to be emulated was the selfless servant of her community, devoted to the cause of education and social work, while the one to be condemned and rejected was the hedonistic personality who had become enamored of entertainment, new fashion and social clubs. But what stands out in *Feroza* is that the family unit is not restored, conjugality is neither Feroza's nor Surayyā's fate and even though Feroza is an ideal, she never even attempts to change the ways of her husband and he stands unimproved, a dismal failure who confused his reckless passion for marital love.

As we see in *Zehrā Begum, Akhtar-un-nissā Begum, Akhtarī Begum* and *Feroza,* there were differences in visions of martial incompatibility and how they could be resolved. Most representations of marital compatibility were based on the 'ideal conjugal couple' where both the husband and wife had capacity for self-improvement and discipline. The writers of these novels espoused similar views in their magazine articles and columns published in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat,* which were often in conversation with similar or opposite opinions.

Now that we have considered literary representations of 'respectable conjugality' and its constructions of 'good wife' and 'good husband,' it is important to highlight the nature of marriages actually occurring in society that had been praised by reformers.

'Reformed' Marriages

One of the salient features of the discussion on marriage in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* was that it sometimes carried reports of marriages, which particularly aimed to highlight these qualities and inform its readers about 'reformed' marriages taking place in the community. Some of these columns included information about the marriages of prominent writers and activists such as Nazr Sajjād Hyder and Sajjād Hyder Yildirim,[343] Atiyā Fyzee and Samuel Rahamin[344] as well as others involving people not very well known in journalistic and literary life. These reports always included information about the education and employment of the husband along with the wife's interest in social issues and her contributions to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* In addition to these concerns, they also pointed out that the wedding was marked by the absence of 'useless' rituals or customs, the adherence to Sharia norms and moderate spending by the family. One Anjum Ārā,

[343] Mumtāz Alī, "shādī katkhudai," (Marriage) *TN* Vol. 15 No. 5 (June 1912): 309-313.
[344] Muhammadī Begum, "shādī katkhudai," *TN* Vol. 16 No. 3 (18 January 1913): 28-9.

inspector of schools in the town of Shapur, Punjab, sent a report of her sister Sharīf-un-nissā's wedding to a lawyer named Abdul Azīz who was based in Gujranwala, Punjab. The formal *nikāh* ceremony took place on 3 September, 1912 at 8'o clock in the evening attended by a small gathering of close family members. The groom left for Gujranawala the next day and October 17 was appointed to be the date for the remaining ceremonies including the *rukhsati* (the formal departure of the bride from her parent's house). On the evening of October 17, there was dinner for the groom's family and an elder member of the family gave a short speech on the rights of husband and wife. Anjum Ārā claims that there were no rituals, the bride wasn't required to wear a heavy nose ring and had only light jewelry, and had the freedom to look up or straighten her back. Several women expressed their disapproval at the style of wedding but the bride's family paid no heed to objections. In celebration of the wedding, Anjum Ārā sent two rupees to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and asked it to be deposited in the Tripoli fund. [345]

Another report of marriage was the wedding of Razia Masūd Hasan, a frequent writer to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* based in the city of Moradabad. Razia Masūd Hasan was the daughter of Maulvī Laiq Ahmad Alavī, a Moradabad lawyer and was married to Masūd Hasan Siddīqui, a lawyer also stationed in Moradabad. She was a close friend of Nazr Sajjād Hyder and was particularly vocal in the debate on polygyny. In addition to the usual details about the lack of rituals, her marriage column also carried information about the goods given in dowry especially books. The several dowry books gifted by her family included Muhammadī Begum's *Rafīq-i Arūs,* Mumtāz Alī's *Huqūq-i Nisvān,* Hālī's

[345] Anjum Ārā, "shādī kutkhudai," *TN* Vol. 15 No. 44 (2 November 1912): 540-41. Tripoli fund was a charity set up to raise money for wounded Turkish soldiers following the invasion of North African parts (modern day Libya) of Ottoman Empire by Italy.

Musaddas, Azad's *Ab-e Hayāt,* volumes of the journal *Tahzīb-ul Akhlāq,* Shiblī's *Al-Fārūq* and *Al-Ma'mūn* and general texts on household management along with histories of Quran, Hadith, Ottomans and the larger Islamic world. [346] The gifting of books to women especially as marriage dowry illustrates an important moment in the history of female education and marks the impact of the figure of the 'reading woman' on social and cultural practices. Books like Akbarī Begum's *Godar kā Lāl* and Ashraf Alī Thānavī's *Bihishtī Zewar* had already acquired a wide readership within Urdu-speaking Muslim families and were routinely presented in marriages. The unique feature of Razia Masūd Hasan's dowry, however, is that it reveals that socially approved female readership was not exclusively limited to didactic literature produced for women but encompassed a range of books including poetry, theology and history.

Discussions about the arrangement of marriages weren't limited to acquisition of education and noble character but also included family backgrounds and lineages. Marriage within the family especially amongst cousins was an acceptable custom in the Muslim community and was the focus of debate along with other issues surrounding marriage and family. Inter-cousin marriages were criticized for medical reasons and were called an unwise custom that could damage health of future generations.[347] Writers also complained that parents forced their children to marry their nieces and nephews and there had been reported instances of even suicide by some young women. [348] Some attributed the custom of inter-cousin marriages to selfishness where people considered their own

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[346] Aik Tahzībī Behen, "Razia Begum kī Shādī Kutkhudai," (Razia Begum's Marriage) *TN* Vol. 14 No. 5 (4 February 1911): 54-56.
[347] Mumtāz Ahmad Farūqī, "yak hadiyon mein shādī," (Marriage Amongst one's Own) *TN* Vol. 28 No. 7 (14 February 1925): 97-100.
[348] Mrs. M.A Samd, "āpas kī shādī," (Marriage Amongst one's Own) *TN* Vol. 29 No. 47 (20 November 1926): 776-78.

lineage to be higher and unmatched, incomparable to any other family.[349] Others, on the other hand, defended the practice of inter-cousin marriages as Islamic and an acceptable relation under Sharia jurisprudence. But besides Sharia, writers also argued that the bride and groom of inter-cousin marriages often had the advantage of pre-marital familiarity and acquaintance to the extent that even *purdah* was not practiced if the family members involved were very closely related to each other. Intimate knowledge about the groom and his family was particularly attractive for the girl's parents and relieved them of the usual tensions that accompanied marriage. [350]

Marriage within families was also a way of upholding caste amongst Muslims. Nazr Sajjād Hyder accepted critiques of inter-cousin marriages but felt that families of Sayyids and Shaikhs considered to be descendents of Prophet Muhammad should not marry into lower caste, non-Sayyid and non-Shaikh families even if the spouse is highly educated and retain a continuous link to divine lineage. Such strong views of a well-known reformer, who otherwise advocated persistently for female education, abolition of gender segregation and greater choice in marriage illustrates that progressive views were advanced in no small measure by privileged groups who often preserved their prejudices along with a range of more liberal opinions. [351]

Mumtāz Alī intervened in the debate on inter-cousin marriages and argued against one-sided Islamic justification of the practice. According to Mumtāz Alī, an inter-cousin marriage is only permitted in Islam and is neither condemned nor celebrated. Such acts were neither praiseworthy nor sinful but were morally neutral and thus carried no divine

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[349] Razia Khātūn, "āpas mein shadi," *TN* Vol. 30 No. 8 (19 February 1927): 143.
[350] Shafia Begum, "Āpas kĪ shadi," *TN* Vol. 29 No. 50 (11 December 1926): 826-27.
[351] Nazr Sajjād Hyder, "yakhadiyon mein shādī," *TN* Vol. 18 No. 38 (18 September 1915): 454.

rewards or punishments. Those who railed against inter-cousin marriages were as acceptable as those who supported them. One could therefore choose for any option in marriage and marry within the family or outside according to one's wishes. As for the medical reasons against inter-cousin marriages, Mumtāz Alī noted that several cases had established that children born of such marriages were more likely to be unhealthy and also to suffer more from problems of blindness or deafness. Instead of defending them as Islamic, it thus made sense to avoid inter-cousin marriages all together. [352]

Mumtāz Alī's argument about healthy children was challenged by some claiming that the medical effects of inter-familial marriages could only be observed after several generations of continuous practice, which was extremely difficult to find and that much medical critique against it were suggestions which had not been established positively by scientific evidence. [353] Mumtāz Alī dismissed these claims in a counter-rebuttal saying the medical conclusions were based not only on observations amongst humans but from research conducted on birds and animals and that if one wished to doubt scientific research, one could also argue against preventive vaccinations. Even though such arguments may be rhetorically correct, they would not prove that one should stop vaccinating children and therefore inter-cousin marriages should be avoided even if one could prove some day that it made no difference to children's health. [354]

The insistence on marrying outside family, or even community according to one's own wishes was also reflected in the formation of associations. In 1923, a barrister wrote

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[352] Mumtāz Alī, "is par hamāre khyālāt," (Our Views on This) *TN* Vol. 29 No. 50 (11 December 1926): 827-28.
[353] Minhajuddīn, "qarībī rishtadāron mein shādī," (Marriage with Close Relatives) *TN* Vol. 29 No. 52 (25 December 1926): 853.
[354] Mumtāz Alī, "is par hamare khayalat," *TN* Vol. 29 No. 52 (25 December 1926): 855.

in the journal *Tamaddun* that there was an urgency for women and men to insist on freedom in matters of marriage. Although there were few such marriages, the piece said that it could not be denied that those who married in such fashion were condemned within the *birādarī* (community). [355] The writer added that it was necessary to establish an association of such persons so that those whose lives had been damaged as a result of their isolation could come together in friendship to pacify their ills and work towards reform of society.

The editor informed his readers that the note received almost 500 responses and an association called *Social Reform Society* was established, and its first meeting was held with great fanfare in Delhi. At the meeting, the resolutions passed advocated that all members of the society would maintain friendly relations with each other, that each was free to practice their own religion and that nothing should obstruct them in their social relationships and that their children could marry amongst each other and religion would not become an obstruction in those marriages. [356]

Debates about the arrangement of marriages turned wedding planning into an anxious exercise for the family members of bride and groom. The most common advice was to observe compatibility of temperaments before marriage and to overlook any errors in the personality of the spouse as an unavoidable human flaw.[357] One approach, however which contravened reformist advice, was that all concerns of good education, appropriate age and excellent manners should be overlooked in favor of pre-marital love. If a man,

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[355] Barrister Shahjahanpur, "aik anjuman kī zarorat," (The Necessity of an Association) *Tamaddun* Vol. 19 No. 2 (June 1923): 15-16.
[356] Ibid., 16.
[357] Khwājah Husain Alī, "talāsh rishte key usūl," (The Rules for Finding Relations) *TN* (20 November 1920): 748-750.

for example, loves a woman who is less educated and less able than even a highly qualified medical doctor, he ought to marry the former and not the later. The writer, Muhammad Akhtar, argued that love was the binding force of marriage and those in whom management of the world or domesticity had taken dominance at the cost of love could proceed to marry according to their taste but that they had no right to mock genuine lovers. [358] For Muhammad Akhtar, education and skills of housekeeping were minor tasks and they could be acquired even after marriage but they could never become the foundation of marriage. [359]

Elaborating his argument further, he also added that the love of beautiful appearance, which was dismissed by reformers as superficial, was genuine and to treat it with contempt was a great sin. According to the writer, love of beautiful appearance was as truthful as divine love (considered glorious by reformers due to its pious nature) and if there were tales of illusion and betrayal in the love of appearance, there were even greater stories of distrust and infidelity in divine love. Furthermore, brief duration of love caused by beautiful appearances should not be condemned in favor of a lifelong love such as in marriage. Passion ignited by apparent beauty was a sign of strength, and some objects of love acquired value only due to their brevity, and not their enduringness. [360] Continuing the case against the reformist emphasis on education instead of love in marriage, he said that the proclivity for skill and learning was one thing and the propensity for friendship

[358] Muhammad Akhtar, "Usūl-i Izdivāj," (The Principles of Marriage) *TN* (10 July 1920): 456-57.
[359] Ibid., 460.
[360] Ibid., 458.

another. Highly educated and skilled people often lacked the tendency for friendship and they could not be counted as 'ideal' mates in marriage. [361]

Conclusion

Views like that of Muhammad Akhtar were rare and almost all discussion about the arrangement of marriages in early twentieth century rested on three principal concepts: consent, compatibility and education. [362] The idealization and the absolute insistence on achieving such a marriage for a good life is the key feature of the debate on conjugality in Urdu print culture in the early twentieth century. The domestication of desire and intimacy seen in texts like *Islāh-i Hayāt* or *Rafīq-i Arūs* or *Falsafah-yi Izdivāj* continued in novels as well, accompanied by a greater elaboration of the concept of 'respectable conjugality.' Marital compatibility based on education and similar socio-cultural norms or *tarz-e ma'ashirat* was the foundation of the new conjugal respectability. Furthermore, marital compatibility was closely associated, at least in literary representations, with consent. An incompatible marriage was also a forced marriage because it failed to attend to the adaptability of values. Beyond the world of novels and cultural representation, reports of 'reformed marriages' in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* promoted and advocated notions of compatibility and education to an interested audience of magazine readers.

What is important to note here is that consent was not based on pre-marital love or friendship and any suggestion of interaction between men and women before marriage was therefore not published. Such ideas were either condemned as too inappropriate to be

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361 Ibid., 459

362 Jamīlā Begum, "bejodh shādīyan," (Incompatible Marriages) *TN* Vol. 37 No. 51 (December 1934): 1211-1213; A.S, "bezabāno kī shādīyan," (Marriages of Voiceless Ones) *Ismat* Vol. 54 No. 6 (June 1935): 414-415; Kanīz Muhammadī Begum, "bejodh shādīyan," *Ismat* Vol. 47 No. 7 (December 1931): 454-56.

even 'heard' or dismissed as 'western.' Denouncing the state of marriages, one writer argued "justice has vanished from the hearts of men and respecting rights is passé." She added that "women have forgotten their status and regard husbands their God. Every command is regarded as their duty. But they forget that their relation (marriage) is not of commander and the commanded but of love and cordiality." Finishing her argument, she said that "when women become genuinely aware of their status and recognize their rights and duties, then marriage will become a genuine source of virtue and happiness for both men and women." [363]

In the chapters on family so far, we have considered discourses related to the 'idealization' of conjugality. Despite some references to forced marriages, they mostly subjugate love, desire, intimacy and affect to utilitarian concerns of good education and self-discipline along with respectable employment and economic stability. Even consent, gained out of love, found little expression in these narratives. Consent, education and marital compatibility were the sites on which familial harmony of a 'respectable marriage' was ideologically constructed, preserved and maintained. In the next two chapters, I illustrate how this ideology failed, and when discord and discontent appeared in family life.

[363] S.R, "Izdivāj," (Marriage) *TN* Vol. 36 No. 39 (September 1933): 938.

Chapter 4: Polygyny

In this chapter, we will look at the debate on polygyny. Polygyny was the site of much contestation and debate during the colonial period.[364] Even though polygyny was also practiced amongst the Hindus, the issue acquired a particular salience for the Muslim community.[365] The perception that it is allowed in Islam and has a Quranic sanction made it a marker of Muslim identity and provided a distinctiveness that it otherwise would not have had. Under conditions of colonialism, polygyny came to be inextricably linked to the social identity of Muslims. Colonial officials, especially those associated with Christian evangelism, contributed to the "Islamic" particularity of polygyny. William Muir, a Secretary to the government of the North-Western Provinces, wrote a four volume text on Islam called *Life of Mahomet and History of Islam to the Era of the Hegira,* which was published in 1861.

Along with divorce and slavery, Muir mentioned polygyny as one of the "radical evils" stemming from the Quran "striking as they do at the root of public morals, poisoning domestic life and disorganizing society." [366] He further noted that polygyny in Islam

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[364] Important sections of this chapter have been taken from an article published previously. See Asiya Alam, "Polygyny, Family and Sharafat: Discourses amongst North Indian Muslims, circa 1870-1918," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 45 Issue 3 (2011): 631-668.

[365] For a study of polygyny in the Hindu community, see Varsha Joshi, *Polygamy and Purdah: Women and Society among Rajputs* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1995); Atul Krishna Kundu, *Polygamy and the Hindu* (Chinsura: Kundu, 1980); Malvika Karlekar, *Reflections on Kulin Polygamy: Nistarini Debi's Sekeley Katha* (New Delhi: Center for Women's Development Studies, 1995).

[366] William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and the History of Islam to the era of the Hegira* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861), Vol. 4, p. 321.

"creates an irreconcilable divergence from Christianity."[367] More than any other issue relating to family reform, the debate on polygyny thus came to be specifically associated with the question of Muslim identity and distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the colonial period.

The Early Debate: Polygyny as a Problem in Islam

The initial rejoinders by Muslim modernists to colonial criticism of polygyny including the writings by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Sayyid Ahmad) and Syed Ameer Ali (Ameer Ali) were published in the 1870s and mostly directed towards an English-speaking audience. Sayyid Ahmad's *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* was published in 1870 and Ameer Ali's *The Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad* was produced in 1873. The Urdu version of Sayyid Ahmad's *A Series of Essays* was published in 1887 as *Al-Khutbat al-Ahmadiya fi al-Arab wa al-sirat al-Muhammadiya.*[368] Sayyid Ahmad's *Essays* contains commentaries on the Quran, theological literature on Prophet Muhammad and disputation on Islamic practices and institutions such as polygyny, divorce and slavery, while Ameer Ali's *Critical Examination of Muhammad* is an erudite and exhaustive account of the history of Islam, its principles and its relation to other monotheistic faiths. Both Sayyid Ahmad and Ameer Ali join issues with European scholars of Islam, critiquing the works of Sprenger, William Muir, Weil, Thomas Carlyle amongst others. On the question of polygyny,

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[367] William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and the History of Islam to the era of the Hegira* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861), Vol. 3, p. 24.

[368] Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Al-Khutbat al-Ahmadiya fi al-Arab wa al-sirat al-Muhammadiya* edited by Muhammad Ismail Panipati (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1964), reprint.

Sayyid Ahmad employed his framework of "natural theology" while Ameer Ali scrutinized it through the idea of historical variability.

Sayyid Ahmad addressed the issue of polygyny in one of the essays, titled "On the question whether Islam has been Beneficial or Injurious to Human Society in General, and to the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations."[369] Sayyid Ahmad did not encourage the practice of polygyny but he fell short of total denunciation of the practice. The use of permission to marry more than one wife, he argued, "was the privilege use being reserved for such as for physical reasons may stand in need of it, but in the absence of such an excuse the indulgence in it is wholly contrary to the virtues and morality taught by Islam."[370]

For Sayyid Ahmad, recourse to polygyny was 'justified' only by "real necessity." This 'necessity' was "perpetuation of one's kind or children." He argued that "when, from whatever cause, this helpmate (woman in marriage) fails to perform her natural duty, some remedy must surely have been appointed by the Creator to meet this exigency and that remedy is polygamy."[371] Sayyid Ahmad endorsed childbearing as one genuine and rightful cause for polygyny to be practiced, which we shall also observe later in the novel *Iqbal Dulhan* by Bashiruddin Ahmad. What is crucial to note here is that fertility of a

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[369] Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Whether Islam has been Beneficial….." *A Series of Essays,* Polygyny is discussed from page 147 to 152; in *Al-Khutbat,* see 190-98. He also discussed this question separately in an article: "Ta'ddud-I Azvaj ka Mas'ala." In *Maqalat-I Sir Sayyid,* Muhammad Ismail Panipati (ed.), Vol. 13, reprint (Lahore: Majlis-I Taraqqi Adab, 1963), 259-65.

[370] Ibid, 147.

[371] Ibid., 148.

woman and reproduction were indispensable to the definition of marriage. Concepts of fertility and reproduction had social and religious implications, and practices and traditions of marriage and familial relationships were woven around sexuality and childbearing. Related to this understanding of marriage are notions of wifehood and motherhood. Only those women with reproductive capacity could belong to a monogamous marriage.

In explaining his position, Sayyid Ahmad defined marriage as a practice that counters loneliness of man where God made in woman a helpmate for man "who is destined to share with him the cares and the amenities, the sorrows and the pleasures of life."[372] Moreover, whatever weakened individual and social happiness of man must be regarded as serious evil. [373] For Sayyid Ahmad, the practice of polygyny was "not an unrestrained gratification of animal appetites" but permissible with restraints such "as perfect equality of rights and privileges, love and affection among all wives etc" and that:

> these restrictions and regulations materially serve to prevent truly pious and religious person from indulging in polygamy, for they almost immediately discover that the availing themselves of this privilege, without fulfilling its conditions and observing its regulations, which are so strict as to be extremely difficult to be compiled with.[374]

In summary, one could argue that Sayyid Ahmad was critical of polygyny but also believed that it could be permitted for childbearing. This ambiguity, however, did not

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[372] Ibid., 148.

[373] bid., 148.

[374] Ibid., 148-9.

desensitize him to the question of rights and sentiments in marriage, and he further contended that polygyny must maintain equality of rights.

Sayyid Ahmad also addressed polygyny in his Urdu writings where he conversed primarily with the ulema instead of the British officials. In a full length article on polygyny, he argued for a principle of gender difference between men and women due to "natural" reasons and then engaged in exegesis of a *hadith* that Muslim theologians used to support polygyny. He doubted the correctness of the *hadith* and contended that it was picked up, twisted and exaggerated by the missionaries and Western critics of Islam. He concluded the article by saying that:

> The command in Qur'an is for monogamy. Polygyny is allowed only in those special circumstances when reason and ethics in response to the fulfillment of the requirements of human nature and culture legitimize its practice, and when there is no fear of violation of the rule of justice. [375]

Sayyid Ahmad retained his ambiguous position in his Urdu writings although there is a stronger emphasis on monogamy. He remained perturbed by the missionary critique of Islam and amongst his last writings is an incomplete article on the Prophet's wives.[376]

The other important English commentary on Islam was Syed Ameer Ali's *Critical Examination of Muhammad* published in 1873.[377] In his discussion of polygyny, Ameer

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[375] Sayyid Ahmad, "Ta'addud-I Azwāj kā Masla" in *Maqalat-I Sir Sayyid,* Muhammad Ismail Panipati (ed.), Vol. 13 (reprint) (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1963) 265.

[376] Sayyid Ahmad, "Azwāj-i Mutahharat-i Rasūl-i Khudā Sallallah-u alaih-i wsallam" in *Maqalat-i Sir Saiyid*, Ismail Panipati (ed.) Vol 4 (reprint) (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi-yi Adab, 1962), pp. 222-59.

[377] For an analysis of Ameer Ali's position on women, see Avril Powell "Islamic Modernism and Women's Status: The Influence of Syed Ameer Ali" in Avril Powell

Ali acknowledged the 'conditional clause' implicit in the Quranic injunction on Islam. But his critique of polygyny differs from Sayyid Ahmad's in its strong emphasis on history instead of "natural theology" as a basis of explanation. He first presents an overview of the practice of polygyny in different cultures ranging from Persians, Spartans, Romans, Babylonians, Athenians and Romans, at different historical periods to establish that "history, proves conclusively that, until very recent times, polygamy was not considered so reprehensible as it is now."[378] Underscoring a historical perspective, he adds that:

> the fact must be borne in mind that the existence of polygamy depends on circumstances. Certain times, certain conditions of society make its practice absolutely needful…. But with the progress of thought, with the change of conditions ever going on in this world, the necessity for polygamy, or more properly polygyny, disappears, and its practice is tacitly abandoned or expressly forbidden.[379]

Following this contention, Ameer Ali argues that in countries where the means for women to help themselves exist, this practice has come to be regarded as evil while in those societies where such circumstances are non-existent "where the means, which in civilized communities enable women to help themselves, are absent or wanting, polygamy must necessarily continue to exist."[380]

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and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (ed.) *Rhetoric and Reality: Gender and the Colonial Experience in South Asia* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006. 282-317.

[378]Ameer Ali, *Life of Mohammad*, 223.

[379]Ibid., 227.

[380]Ibid., 227.

Ameer Ali's approach to the issue of polygyny also reflects his judgment of unfair customs or practices that would become a target for reformers. For him, evil was a relative term contingent upon how people view morals in their societies and that "progress of ideas and changes in the conditions of a people may make it evil in its tendency and in process of time it may be made by the state, illegal." [381] Invoking a sort of historical relativism, he maintains that the ethical judgment of usages and customs hinges on "the circumstances, or as they are or are not in accordance with the conscience- 'the spirit'- of the time, is a fact much ignored by superficial thinkers."[382]

Besides Ameer Ali, other Western-educated Muslims from Bengal had also begun to condemn polygyny. [383] Dilawar Husain Ahmad Mirza, the first Muslim graduate from Calcutta University and appointed as the Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector in the Provincial Executive Service in 1861, wrote "The Causes of the Decline of Mohammadan Civilization" between 1869 and 1879. In this tract, he argued that polygyny is one "…of those peculiarities of Mohammadan society which is sure to keep us in a backward state of civilization so long as the prevailing ideas on the subject should not be modified." He also maintains that polygyny directed men's minds towards sensuality and "the sensual pleasures enervate both the body and the mind- and to this

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[381] Ibid., 236.

[382] Ibid., 236.

[383] See also Shiblī Nomānī, "Ta'addud-i Azwāj" in *Maqalat-i Shiblī, Volume 1,* (Azamgarh: Dar-ul Musanafeen, Shiblī Academy, 1999), reprint, 146-55.

enervation must be ascribed the large proportion of incompetent sovereigns amongst Mohammadan communities."[384]

Ameer Ali criticized polygyny from a very different perspective than Sayyid Ahmad. For him, history passed the verdict on traditions that needed to be "reformed" and while polygyny was appropriate for Prophet's time, it must disappear in communities where women had acquired education and rights. It must be added that Ameer Ali agreed with Sayyid Ahmad on the conditional clause requiring justice to all partners in polygyny and believed that this condition "may be considered as prohibitive of a plurality of wives."[385] Others like Dilawar Husain Mirza believed that polygyny was one of the chief causes not only for the "decline" and "backwardness" of Muslims but also for "incompetent sovereigns."

The initial colonial debate on polygyny was limited largely to the publication of books and journal articles. By the 90s, however, it had expanded to a much wider scale and was held in newly formed *anjumans* and associations. One Muhammad Abdul Ghani (Ghani) defended polygyny at a lecture given at the sixth anniversary of Anjuman Himayat-I Islam in 1891. Ghani insisted that the chief aim of marriage was "the propagation of the kind under most favorable conditions" and polygyny was essential during "the period of women's pregnancy where the man can impregnate another woman"driven by

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[384] Dilawar Husain Ahmad Mirza, "The Causes of the Decline of Mohammadan Civilization" in Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.) *Muslim Modernism in Bengal: Selected Writings of Delawarr Hosaen Ahmed Meerza, 1840-1913* Dacca: Center for Social Studies, Dacca University, 1980, 55-6.
[385] Ameer Ali, *Life of Mohammad*, 226.

"physiology and nature" or when the couple is unable to bear children or have only female children. [386]

Thus, there was no single opinion on the question of polygyny. This diversity and range of ideas expressed itself more forcefully and vibrantly in the novels and journal articles of early twentieth century, informed by changing historical conditions.

Legitimate Polygyny

Along with the issues of marital compatibility and consent in marriages, the literature of Urdu novels remained for polygyny also one of the most active spaces for advice, discussion and critique. Amongst Urdu novels, *Gudar kā Lāl: Khawātīn aur Ladkīyon ke liye aik Nasīhat khez Novel* (The Ruby in Rags: A Novel with Advice for Women and Girls) by Akbarī Begum (d. 1929)[387] published in 1907 [388] and *Iqbāl Dulhan* (The Bride Iqbal) by Bashīruddīn Ahmad (d. 1927) published in 1908 elaborated the concept of 'legitimate polygyny' hinted by earlier reformers like Sayyid Ahmad and argued that under certain conditions polygyny was acceptable.

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[386] Maulavi Muhammad Ghani, *Polygamy: A Lecture* (Lahore: The Mohammadan Tract and Book Depot, 1891), 3, 11-12.

[387]Akbarī Begum was the *momani* (wife of maternal uncle) of Nazr Sajjād Hyder, mother of the well-known Urdu writer Qurratulain Hyder. She wrote *Gudar kā Lāl* under the pseudonym of Vālida-i Afzal Alī (Mother of Afzal Ali) in consideration of the practice of strict *purdah*, an integral part of female living, among *ashraf* Muslims. Akbarī Begum's other works include *Guldasta-i Muhabbat, Sho'la-e Pinhan* and *Iffat-i Nisvān.* For details, see Qurratulain Hyder, *Kār-I Jahān Darāz Hai* (The Task of the World is Endless), (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2003) reprint.

[388]Qurratulain Hyder mentions that the book was published in 1907: *Kār-I Jahān Darāz Hai* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2003) reprint, 150. Shaista Suhrawardy in her study writes that it was serialized in the journal *Sharīf Bībī* in 1911-12 and then published in book form: Shaista Akhtar B. Suhrawardy *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story* (Reprint) (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006), reprint, 110-111.

Akbarī Begum came from an illustrious Sayyid family of Muradabad, a well known city situated in the northwestern region in modern Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. Her father Mīr Mazhar Alī lived in Siyalkot, a town now in Pakistan. Akbarī was born here some time in the 1870s (date is uncertain). She was given the name Kanīz Abbās at the time of her birth, but was better known as Akbari Begum. She was married to Mīr Fazl Alī *sala* of Nazr-ul Bāqer,[389] father of writer Nazr Sajjād Hyder. [390]

Qurratulain Hyder mentions some crucial events in the life of Akbarī Begum that inspired her to write about the worlds of women. Akbarī Begum's family, though fully settled in Lahore in Punjab visited their ancestral home in Muradabad, Uttar Pradesh during festivals and family rituals. On one such occasion, when she along with several members of her extended family were in Muradabad, she observed keenly the rites and superstitious beliefs connected with the old social practices, which had a close bearing on women's lives. During this visit, Qurratualain Hyder reports that Akbarī Begum met her eighty year old maternal aunt and observed her plight. She was believed to be possessed by a jinn the very first day of her wedding and therefore was not allowed to leave for her husband's house. Constrained to stay back home, she confined herself to her prayer carpet, engaging all the time in litanies, repeating the name of Allah alone all through her life.

Hyder notes that Akbarī perspicaciously noted that while the women in the inner quarters of the house were afflicted with diseases like tuberculosis, hysteria and

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[389] *Sala* is the relation of the brother to his sister's husband. Mīr Fazl Alī was the brother of Mustafai, wife of Nazr-ul Baqer.

[390] Qurratulain Hyder, *Kār-I Jahān Darāz Hai* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2003), 145.

melancholia, the men outside engaged in pursuit of pleasures and were busy in gambling. These experiences influenced Akbarī's ideas about gender relations in society and provided her with plenty of materials for her novels. Her first novel was *Guldasta-e Muhabbat* (The Bouquet of Love), which was written under the pseudonym of Abbasī Murtaza.[391]

'*Gudar kā Lāl'*, written in three volumes and described as *Khawātīn aur Ladkīyon ke Liye aik Nasīhat Khez Novel'*(A Novel with Counsels for Women and Girls), is a dense and multilayered novel that tackles numerous questions simultaneously such as the literacy and education of women, incompatible marriage, polygyny and other dilemmas associated with family relationships. It revolves around the fate of children of two sisters and one brother. Zinat-un-nissā (Zinat) and Qamar-un-nissā (Qamar) are the two sisters, the brother's name is not mentioned but sister-in-law Amir-un-nissā (Amir) is the head of the household. Qamar has two sons, Hamid Ali and Yusuf Raza, and a daughter, Khair-un-nissā. Amir has six children: three sons, Khair Alī, Hasan Raza and Shākir and three daughters, Hamida Begum, Maqbūl and Surayyā Jabīn. These cousins have intermarried. Khair Alī is married to Khair-un-nissā and Maqbūl is married to Yusuf Raza.

Gudar kā Lāl follows multiple plots as it traces the stories of the children of these sisters, their education, their marriages and their other familial and non-familial relationships. Yusuf Raza's first marriage is with Maqbūl, who has little education, and proves to be a total ill match to the educated Yusuf Raza. To "overcome" this discrepancy, he marries a highly educated woman, Mehr Jabīn. This constitutes his

[391] Ibid., 149-50.

second marriage and the dynamic of relationship between Mehr Jabīn, his second wife, and Maqbool, his first wife, comprises most of the novel.

The second novel under consideration is *Iqbāl Dulhan* by Bashīruddīn Ahmad (Ahmad), son of the noted early Urdu writer Nazīr Ahmad. Ahmad held a high administrative position in Nizam's service in Hyderabad Deccan. He took early retirement and settled in his home town, Delhi, where he died in 1927. Ahmad is best known for his voluminous writings in Urdu on history. These works include *Waqi'at-i Darul Hukumat Dehli*, a history of Delhi in three volumes, *Waqi'at-i Mamlikat-i Bijapur* also in three volumes, a text on Mughal Farmans titled "*Faramin-i Salatin*"; and another on Queen Victoria called *Hayat-e Malika-i Victoria, Qaisara-i Hind*. Besides his historical writing, Ahmad also wrote about family and marriage including *Husn-i Muasharat, Islāh-i Muashiat, Lakht-i Jigar* and *Fughan-e Ashraf.* [392] He acknowledged his literary and intellectual debt to his father and mentioned especially the influence of *Mirāt al-Arūs* on his *Iqbāl Dulhan*, desiring "to walk the same path and build on the foundation that he [Naziī Ahmad] had established."[393]

The novel *Iqbāl Dulhan* follows the life of Iqbāl Mirza who is born and raised in an *ashraf* family of Delhi in early twentieth century. The plot revolves around the second marriage of Iqbāl Mirza and the ordeals that the family encounters as a result of this

[392] Muhammad Muslim Dehlavi, " Maulavi Bashīruddīn Ahmad: Aik Muarrikh Tarīkh ke Jharoke se" in Salahuddin (ed.) *Dilli Wale,* Delhi: Urdu Academy, volume II, 1988, 217-231.

[393] Bashiruddin Ahmad, *Iqbal Dulhan* (Delhi: Khari Bavli, 1908), 3.

polygynous union. Iqbāl Mirza's father, Nawāb Mirza, expires early in his childhood leaving behind two married daughters, Iqbal and his baby sister. Iqbāl Mirza receives his primary education at Aligarh University and later studies at Cambridge. Upon his return from England, he joins Civil Service and is appointed Assistant Commissioner in the North Indian district of Gurgaon. Well settled in a job, his mother begins her search for a suitable bride. He is married to Zaib-un-nissā, who is also brought up in an *ashraf* home and lives in the same neighborhood as the family of Iqbāl Mirza. The early conjugal life of Iqbāl Mirza and Zaib-un-nissā is joyous and blissful. However, this happiness is short lived since they don't have any children. Iqbāl Mirza's desire for a child leads him to contemplate about a second marriage. The decision of second marriage is marked by dilemma and torment. The confusion and anxiety of Iqbāl Mirza, and the grief and heartache of his wife over the second marriage forms the basic plot of the story. After the birth of children from the second wife, their marital tension is eased, the relations improve and Zaib-un-nissā accommodates to Iqbāl's second marriage. The co-wives start to live on friendly terms, and Iqbāl Mirza is happy.

Both *Iqbāl Dulhan* and *Gudar kā Lāl* depict the major concerns of the *ashraf* community, where the protagonists are ideal characters displaying praiseworthy behavior that is to be inculcated through education. The perfection and nobility of the protagonist in *Iqbāl Dulhan* was centered on worries about 'respectability'. He is a man fit to be emulated. Conscious of the death of his father at a tender age, he steadfastly and diligently completes his education at Aligarh and also earns a scholarship to acquire higher education in Cambridge. In his childhood, he remains obedient to his mother, and in adulthood he maintains a courteous relationship with her and other elder members of

the family. In addition to his steady relationships, he also honors religion and his cultural heritage placing a high value on adherence to basic principles of Islam.

A similar sentiment is present in *Gudar kā Lāl.* The society depicted in *Gudar kā Lāl* highlights the struggle between the 'new' lifestyle, on the one hand, where education and employment were new markers of 'respectability,' and the more conventional family structure, on the other, where marriage especially of young women occurred at an early age and education at higher levels after adulthood was seen as a violation of filial honor and duty. The novel reflects this conflict within the same generation and between cousins. Surayyā and Hasan Raza are the prototypes of the 'respectable' protagonist common to *ashraf* novels. They are astute in understanding human relationships, adjust to demanding situations and most importantly desire a good education to acquire greater social mobility. Both Hasan Raza and Surayyā flee from their homes for Lahore to carry on their education. In contrast to Surayyā, Maqbūl, her sister, is not interested in her education and grows to be indifferent to the needs of her husband, Yusuf Raza, and her child. *Gudar kā Lāl* explores the implications of this incongruity in education between Surayyā and Maqbūl in extensive detail. In addition to the discrepancy between Surayyā and Maqbūl, it also highlights the contrast in education between Yusuf Raza and Maqbūl. Yusuf Raza educates himself to become a lawyer whereas Maqbūl remains uneducated. In *Gudar kā Lāl,* this discrepancy between husband and wife or men and women, more generally, defines the contours of an "incompatible marriage." Akbarī Begum permits Yusuf Raza to surmount his "incompatible marriage" through a polygynous marriage to an educated woman, Mehr Jabīn. In the resulting triad of the co-wives and the husband,

she constructs a story involving the development of friendship between the co-wives Maqbūl and Mehr Jabīn.

Both *Gudar kā Lāl* and *Iqbāl Dulhan* argue, although differently, that under certain conditions polygyny is acceptable and even required. Ahmad first expresses his views on marriage and polygyny when a wedding proposal for Iqbāl Mirza arrives from a family of orthodox Muslims where the bride's grandfather is a respectable *maulavi* (religious scholar) of Delhi. The proposal contains an *iqrarnama* or agreement that the groom's family is expected to approve if they are to proceed with the marriage. The agreement contained a clause against polygyny where a polygynous marriage by Iqbāl Mirza would be unacceptable to the first wife as well as her family. Iqbāl Mirza rejects the clause and makes the classical argument defending polygyny since it is justified in the Qurān. He insists that "the person who attaches this condition and the person who agreed to it are not Muslims, in my opinion, as this is obviously contrary to the Qurānic injunction."[394] He then puts forward the position that the conditions which the Qurān imposes upon the practice of polygyny are too difficult for realization and therefore the practice cannot be sustained or supported for "a wise man with even a little sense of consequence would not undergo this trouble, and drag himself into this predicament….In the Qurān, God forbid, there can never be anything meaningless or bereft of the public good."[395] In spite of this reading, Ahmad does add that "those who take undue advantage of this conditional divine injunction, which by no means implies that it is not practiced, are culprits."[396] Therefore,

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[394] Bashīruddīn Ahmad, *Iqbāl Dulhan*, 82.

[395] Ibid.,83.

[396] Ibid., 85.

men who have a second marriage out of contempt for women or to gratify their sexuality are condemnable, and insult religion. This assertion is used throughout the novel to distinguish between acceptable reasons for marriage as opposed to base ones. Those who engage in latter situations have hearts like "stones ensconced in human flesh. They are not human and are totally deprived of compassion and empathy."[397] This animosity towards 'bad polygyny' raises the question of 'good' or 'acceptable' polygynous unions. Or more specifically, under what conditions was polygyny allowed or considered "legitimate?"

The notion of 'legitimate polygyny' cannot be understood without clarifying beliefs about an 'ideal' marriage. In *Iqbāl Dulhan,* a marriage is considered ideal only when the couple can raise children and continue a familial heritage. Therefore, polygyny is permissible only when the couple cannot, for some reason, have children. As Ahmad writes, "the real purpose of marriage is breeding and unbroken succession of lineage. When this very purpose is lost, then this world and everything in it loses its worth and meaning."[398] He then viscerally explains the absence of children in a person's life where "on his death bed, no one offers him water to drink and after his death, there is none to remember. The joy of having a child mitigates all the bitterness and ordeals of life."[399]

These sentiments on the significance of children in *Iqbāl Dulhan* illustrate how the family was thought about and lived, and how profoundly fertility, reproduction and

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[397]Ibid., 85.

[398] Ibid., 85.

[399]Ibid., 85.

childbearing were the focus of that ideal. Reproduction has been acknowledged as a metaphor for survival, for linking past generations to an increasingly uncertain future. Reproduction and childbearing linger as pervasive themes in the novel. *Iqbāl Dulhan* shows the extraordinary status of childbearing and children in how people experienced the family. Reproduction and fertility were, therefore, essential to the common interests of the family and also the religious community. The Qurānic injunction was understood to be a "solution" to the social "problem" of an infertile marriage and therefore "in complete accord with human nature." [400]

The concept of "legitimate polygyny," for different reasons, is also employed in *Gudar kā Lāl.* Following the escape of Hasan Raza and Surayyā to Lahore, the marriage of Yusuf Raza and Maqbūl is arranged, much against the wishes of Yusuf, by the elders of the family in particular Khair Alī. Due to the lack of education of Maqbūl, significant parts of the chapters of the novel are devoted to the incompetence of Maqbūl in running the household efficiently, and her failure to maintain a clean and tidy house or cook well for Yusuf and his family. She is also not very pious and does not offer her prayers regularly.[401] Moreover, she is friendly with Najaf Khānum, a woman who is the daughter of a *mirasan* (woman of a singing caste) and consequently not *ashraf*. This friendship is particularly offensive to Yusuf who insists to Maqbool that she should cease all interactions with her.[402] Maqbūl, however, does not heed to his advice and follows Najaf's suggestions on most crucial matters including how to maintain her marriage and

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[400] Ahmad, *Iqbāl Dulhan,* 85.

[401] Akbarī Begum, *Gudar kā Lāl,* 70-89, 137-8.

[402] Ibid., 81.

other family relationships. These mannerisms of Maqbūl lead to estrangement between her and Yusuf. The birth of a daughter, Sitara Jabīn, worsens the relations between Maqbūl and Yusuf, and Maqbūl is portrayed as a "bad mother" ignorant of the baby's hygiene and diet.[403] Instead of being joyous at his daughter's birth, Yusuf Raza despairs over Maqbūl's poor learning fearing that her daughter will also be "ignorant, ill-mannered, loquacious and disrespectful like her mother."[404]

The character of Maqbūl echoes the argument that education of women was primarily to transform them into better mothers or wives or daughters, as people subjected to instruction by men. Akbarī Begum in *Gudar kā Lāl* endorses this vision of woman as house managers and more importantly, as mothers. One of the characteristics of the 'new family,' expressed in *Gudār kā Lal,* is an increasing emphasis on motherhood and the role of women as childrearers. Tasks that were hitherto dispersed- to servants, fathers, neighbors, relatives and others- are gathered up under the rubric of maternal responsibility. Concomitantly, reproduction, one of many activities associated with women- and not exclusively with them- becomes the defining aspect of their characters and their lives.

The "incompatible marriage" between Maqbūl and Yusuf due to differences in education becomes the ground for a second marriage. Yusuf shares his frustration with his cousin Hasan, and asks for help in raising his daughter. In response, Hasan writes a letter to Yusuf suggesting a second marriage "because a home cannot be made without a

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[403]Ibid., 139-42.

[404]Ibid., 138.

woman."[405] He also assures Yusuf that he and Surayyā would continue to love him the way they have in the past but requests that he "make some financial arrangements for Maqbūl so that she is not dependent on anyone and a similar arrangement for your daughter so that she is not damaged."[406] After receiving this letter, Yusuf is happy and a search for a second wife begins.

It is important to note that the context for a second marriage in both *Iqbāl Dulhan* and *Gudar kā Lāl* is related to "improving" the family and the establishment of an "ideal" home. For both Ahmad and Akbarī Begum, they are legitimate rationale for a second polygynous marriage. In *Iqbāl Dulhan,* child *bearing* is crucial to "complete" the marriage and reproduction becomes the essential act of continuity for the religious group as much as for the individual or the family and in *Gudar kā Lāl,* child *rearing* is emphasized and polygyny is presented as a "solution" for an "incompatible marriage" and "ignorant mothering" born out of unequal educational opportunities for women.

The resolution of animosity between the first and the second wife is the prominent plot in both *Iqbāl Dulhan* and *Gudar kā Lāl.* Ahmad made his case for "legitimate polygyny" when discussing the *iqrārnama* of the first marriage proposal. Later in the novel, a similar situation is created when Iqbāl Mirza and Zaib-un-nissā, his wife, are unable to have children. As a result, Iqbāl Mirza starts thinking about a second marriage as a "solution" to the problem of childlessness. This process is characterized by anxiety and torment for Iqbal Mirza. But gradually Iqbāl Mirza starts to consider polygyny more favorably. The novel depicts both Iqbal Mirza and his wife caught up in the agony which

[405] Akbarī Begum, *Gudar kā Lal,* p. 275.

[406] Ibid., p. 275.

would lead to his second marriage. After experiencing considerable strain, Iqbāl Mirza is persuaded to a second marriage on the advice of a friend. Not surprisingly, the second marriage is a psychological and emotional shock for Zaib-un-nissā and she is taken ill for months. As news of Zaib-un-nisā's ill health spreads in the family, her maternal grandfather visits and exhorts her to "adjust" and "reconcile" to the emergent situation. Interestingly, it is religion that provides the soother to ameliorate relations between Iqbāl Mirza and Zaib-un-nissā, and most importantly a foundation for cordial settlement between Iqbāl Mirza, Zaib-un-nissā and the second wife. Zaib-un-nissā's grandfather is a noted maulavi of the city and gives her a brief sermon on religious duty and suffering. Referring to *shān-i ubudiyat* or "devotion to Allah," he says, "O daughter, to take the misfortune to this extent over oneself is not commensurate with the requirements of '*shān-i ubudiyat.'* Grief neither defers affliction nor ameliorates it. You cannot avert misfortune by feeling misfortune."[407] Exalting the glory of Allah, he explains that:

> all the relations of this world are just superfluous, true love should only be for Allah…and whatever afflictions we face in this world are all from Allah. We have no control over them; a misfortune is a precursor to relief. We do not like it because we do not understand the secret behind it.[408]

Zaib-un-nissā's grandfather then pacifies and alleviates her pain by comparing her grief to other women in the neighborhood and the community. He says that her polygynous marriage is better than divorce or widowhood. Furthermore, he insists that her situation is better than other co-wives who live in extreme poverty. Reiterating his

[407] Bashīruddīn Ahmad, *Iqbāl Dulhan,* 225.

[408] Ibid., 226.

calls for *shān-i ubudiyat,* he asks his granddaughter not to express anguish over an unpleasant situation since it is against *ubudiyat* and piety. He asks her to build forbearance and fortitude, to fight her circumstances and to develop detachment for "just as the world is temporary, its happiness and grief are also transient."[409] The sermon has a profound impact on Zaib-un-nissā and she starts contemplating her situation. She realizes her folly and the dangers of holding bitterness and distrust towards Iqbāl Mirza. In letters between husband and wife, reconciliation is discussed and Zaib-un-nissā eventually comes to forgive Iqbāl Mirza. After the grandfather's sermon, Zaib-un-nissā, Iqbāl Mirza and the second wife gradually develop an amiable relationship with each other. Iqbāl Mirza and his second wife have children together and Zaib-un-nissā becomes almost a second mother to them. The novel ends when the tensions have been pacified between all three of them to show a tranquil home where the "problem" of childlessness has been tackled through polygyny and every character is content with their marital life.

The grandfather's sermon emphasizes the religious duty of women in marriage where they are the paragons of patience and endurance. Compared to *Iqbāl Dulhan,* in *Gudar kā Lāl,* religion has a lesser role in developing a friendship between the first and the second wife. To a large extent, Akbarī Begum supplants religiosity by education and thus it is the role of the educated second wife who must attend to the conflicts in the home and resolve them through her insight gained in education. After consulting his cousins Hasan and Surayyā, Yusuf marries Mehr Jabīn.

Unlike Maqbūl, Mehr Jabīn is shown to be educated and uncommonly intelligent. As we move ahead in the story, Mehr Jabīn proves to be an "ideal" second wife. She works

[409]Ibid., 228.

to remedy the estranged conjugal relationship between her husband Yusuf and Maqbūl. Acting as the arbiter in the marriage, she hopes to renew Yusuf's affection for Maqbūl and also establish an intimate friendship with Maqbūl.[410] In addition to improving marital ties between Maqbūl and Yusuf, she also assumes the responsibility of raising and educating Sitara Jabīn. While Maqbool was unable to take care of her daughter, Mehr Jabīn is exceptionally attentive to her etiquette and decorum. She subscribes to the journal *Phūl* (Flower) for her and reads out columns from other journals like *Sharīf Bībī* (Respectable Woman).[411] She also divides her day into a schedule and gives lessons in basic arithmetic, Urdu, Persian, the Qurān and the activities of sewing, drawing and cooking.[412] In the character of Mehr Jabīn, Akbarī Begum presented what she considered to be the 'new woman.' *Gudar kā Lāl* reconstitutes the woman of modernity as an organized and efficient mother, the educated woman who was well versed in cooking, sewing, the Qurān and languages of Urdu and Persian. What is unusual in the novel is that instead of a monogamous companionate marriage, the 'new woman' occupies the fragile status of a second wife aspiring for friendly relations with the first wife.

The notion of friendship advocated in *Gudar kā Lāl* evinces direct comparison with *Iqbāl Dulhan.* The ideal of a perfect polygynous marriage based on friendship between

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[410] Akbarī Begum, *Gudar kā Lāl,* 306-11, 334-5, 344-53.

[411] Ibid., 283. *Phūl* was started by Mumtāz Alī in 1910 and edited by Nazr Sajjād Hyder, whereas *Sharīf bībī,* founded in 1910, was edited by Fatima Begum, daughter of Mahbub Alam, editor of *Paisa Akhbar.* Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars,* 120, 148-9, 180, 269, 290.

[412] Ibid., 303, 305.

the first and the second wife is depicted in both the novels. The range and depth of questions and issues expressed in *Gudar kā Lāl,* however, are different and more widespread than in *Iqbāl Dulhan. Iqbāl Dulhan* is centered entirely on child bearing and fertility while *Gudar kā Lāl* introduces to the discourse of polygyny issues of education of women and their autonomy, compatibility between men and women in marriage, and the raising of children. Despite this difference, the treatment of polygyny in *Iqbāl Dulhan* is more humane than in *Gudar kā Lāl.* The plot is resolved around the amelioration of suffering of the first wife and friendship between the co-wives results from the generosity of the first wife whereas *Gudar kā Lāl* leaves no impression of the possible distress and affliction caused to Maqbūl due to polygyny. By contrast, the grief of Maqbūl is expressed by the liberal consciousness of Mehr Jabīn.

The words '*haq'* (right) and '*huqūq'* (rights) appear frequently in conversations between Mehr Jabīn and Yusuf Raza. Mehr Jabīn asserts the rights of the first wife when discussing her relationship with Maqbūl:

> Sir, I am a woman and very familiar with the heart of another woman. If you were to marry again, I would be bitter with envy and shame. She is the first wife and I am the cause of her grief and pain. All that I am entitled to is actually hers and she has become the outsider. Even her child is in my care. Her life is becoming increasingly bitter. Only your affection can act as a balm for her wounded heart. I would feel sorry for myself if I, as a woman, were unaware of her predicament. If I can't wish relief for a fellow woman, then I am not deserving of being a woman.

Continuing her conversation, Mehr Jabīn says:

> Yusuf, wouldn't it be displeasing to God if I seize everything that you have in your possession including your relationships and your child. And I remain happy when awake and sleep at peace during the night. And in the same house, there is another woman who also has the same rights as I have. Indeed, as the first wife she has more rights than me. But neglectful of everything, she spend her nights restlessly in worried sleep and her days in agony and anguish. And there is no one to enquire about her well-being. No, no, I will never tolerate this.[413]

This plea of Mehr Jabīn, clearly the voice of Akbarī Begum, encapsulates multiple dilemmas that confronted women reformers when they addressed the question of polygyny. The rights of both the first and second wife had to be balanced in a deeply polarizing situation. For Akbarī Begum, a discourse of conjugal rights of both wives was the only innovative way to challenge male supremacy in a polygynous marriage, and also foster care and intimacy between the two wives. Throughout the novel, Mehr Jabīn maintains her gestures of amiability and friendliness towards Maqbūl despite Maqbūl's indifference and hostility to her efforts. The final reconciliation between Maqbūl and Mehr Jabīn occurs at the death of Maqbūl's friend, Najaf Khānum.

The character of Najaf is crucial in understanding the argument about the education and tutoring of a girl child that Akbarī Begum built in *Gudar kā Lāl.* Towards the end of the novel, Najaf is shown having been taken incurably ill. Najaf then decides to disclose to Maqbūl her true feelings and to tell her about her past. She reveals that she had all along been conspiring to destroy her marriage and says that her father, even though he grew in a *sharīf* family, was not raised well and often socialized with vagrants in the

[413]Ibid., 347.

neighborhood wasting his life in gambling. To improve his ways, he was married to a *sharīf* woman. The marriage stabilized him but only temporarily. Soon he returned to his earlier practices, developed an illicit relation with another "low born" woman who gave birth to her and her elder sister. When she (Najaf) was one, this woman started loving another man, eloped with him and, on the other hand, her (Najaf's) father too had yet another involvement with a member of a *mirasan*, who now lived with her father and who brought her up. As she (Najaf) was under her care and control, she remained totally deprived of education and good tutoring. Najaf's father worked with Khair Alī and thus she had a chance to be mostly with Maqbūl at her house. She became infatuated with Hasan Raza, and after being snubbed by him and her failure in her overtures, she turned to Yusuf Raza. There too she failed miserably. Meanwhile, the family arranged Maqbūl's wedding to Yusuf Raza. Najaf reveals that this enraged her and she now grew excessively jealous of her (Maqbūl), and began to plot to destroy their marriage. To remove any possibility of suspicion, she then feigned to be more friendly and sincere to her. Maqbūl thus acted totally on her advice. At the end of her disclosure, Najaf seeks forgiveness from Maqbūl and suggests her to trust Mehr Jabīn and act on her advice as she had hitherto done with her.[414]

This disclosure by Najaf followed by her death shocks Maqbūl and she becomes bed ridden for quite some time. During her illness, Mehr Jabīn attends to her needs and takes care of her, which enhances Maqbool's appreciation for Mehr's sincerity. Thereupon, following her recovery, both Maqbūl and Mehr live together as true sisters and friends. In Najaf's character the novelist highlights the prejudices that were integral to the reformist

[414] Ibid., 576-81.

agenda of women's education. Education was meant to define the acceptable social space for freedom for the modern woman and this space was to include only the *ashraf* community, not the mean and selfish *mirasans.* An educated woman preserved her *sharāfat* by self-policing her interaction and associating herself only with *sharīf,* educated women. The "incompatible marriage" in *Gudar kā Lāl* born out of inequities in education thus turned marriage into a space for the contestation of the norms of *sharāfat.*[415] *Sharāfat* thus constitutes the central aspect of the discourse of polygyny. The issue of marital incompatibility between men and women could be cracked through the second wife, an idealization of *sharāfat,* who vociferously demands rights and education for women and also upholds polygyny by making room for the conjugal ties between her husband and the first wife. Much like the discourse on *sati* in colonial India, we note that contradiction and ambiguity are striking features of the debate on polygyny. Moreover the difference between *Iqbāl Dulhan* and *Gudar kā Lāl* demonstrates that gender roles as propagated in early twentieth century Urdu fiction were not the same and could by no means be considered fixed, even at the prescriptive level.

Both *Godar kā Lāl* and *Iqbāl Dulhan* occupy a special position in terms of their wide impact on the community, their readership and the responses they received from the Urdu

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[415] Akbarī Begum did not support polygyny outside the boundaries of *ashraf* community. In one instance in *Gudar kā Lāl,* Khair Alī, the male patriarch, has an affair with the domestic help of the household. He marries her much to the dismay and sadness of his first wife, Khair-un-nissā. His actions are treated by contempt by everyone in the family in particular Yusuf. Eventually, his second wife runs away with jewelry and clothes. Khair Alī realizes his mistake and discovers the "difference between *sharif* (respectable) and *khandani* (high ancestry) wives and *awara* (vagabond) and *zaleel* (low/contemptible) women." *Gudar kā Lal,* 255. For details of the whole affair, see from 244 to 255.

speaking public. A particular instance is the reception of the novel *Gudar kā Lāl* by Saliha Abid Husain (d.1988), a noted modern Urdu writer.[416] In her autobiography, she singles out *Gudar kā Lāl* as the most significant influence on her married life. The novel had a special resonance for Saliha Abid Husain (Saliha Husain) because the dilemmas and situation of one of its female characters, Mehr Jabīn, came to acquire a striking resemblance to her own life. Saliha Husain was the second wife of Sayyid Abid Husain (d.1978), (Abid Husain) himself a major modern Muslim scholar[417], in a polygynous

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[416] Saliha Abid Husain, great grand daughter of Altaf Husain Hali (d. 1914), was born in Panipat in modern day Haryana in 1913. She received her primary education at Panipat and Aligarh, and read voraciously as a child. Her first attempt at novel writing was in 1929, which was unpublished and eventually destroyed by her. She, however, continued writing in women's journals like *Tahzīb-i Nisvān, Saheli, Noorjahan* and *Ismat.* She also won prizes from the editor for the articles that she wrote for *Ismat*. From 1936, she started writing speeches for All India Radio and later wrote articles that were recited at *Bazm-e Khawātīn* (Women's Association) at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Her first published novel was *Azra* which appeared in 1944. She summarized her pain and trauma of the plunder of Panipat during Partition in a series of articles called *Niras mein Aas* (Hope in Despair) which was published from Bombay, and dedicated to Gandhi. Her second novel *Atish-e Khāmosh* (The Silent Fire) was published in 1948, and her third novel *Rah-e Amal* was published in 1957. Her other important works include *Khawatīn-i Karbala* (Women of Karbala) and *Yādgār-i Hālī,* a biography of Hālī. Saliha Abid Husain, *Silsala-i Roz-o- Shab: Khudnavisht* (The Cycle of Day and Night: An Autobiography) (New Delhi: Maktaba Jamia Limited, 1984), 280-90.

[417] Sayyid Abid Husain was born in 1896 in Bhopal, where he received his primary education. After school he attended Muir Central College in Allahabad and then went to Oxford for further education. Unable to study at Oxford, he decided to go to Germany where he completed his Doctorate in Philosophy from University of Berlin in 1925. See Sayyid Abid Husain, *Hayāt-i Abid: Khudnavisht* (Life of Abid: An Autobiography) (Delhi: Maktaba Jamia,1984). He translated important philosophical and literary tracts from German into Urdu, including Goethe's Faust: Part I (*Goethe ka Faust: Hissah Avval,* Aurangabad: Anjuman-e Taraqqi-ye Urdu, 1931), Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (*Tanqīd-i Aql-i Mahaz,* Delhi: Anjuman-e Taraqqi-ye Urdu, 1941) and Boer's History of Islamic Philosophy (*Tarīkh-i Falsafah-yi Islam,* Delhi: Maktaba Jamia, 1936). His translations from English include Gandhi's My Experiments with Truth (*Talāsh-i Haqq: Mahatma Gandhi kī Āap Bītī,*Delhi: Maktaba Jamia, 1935) and Plato's Selected Dialogues (*Mukalamat-i Aflātūn,* Delhi: Anjuman-e

marriage and she, much like Mehr Jabeen in *Gudar kā Lāl,* developed friendly and warm relations with the first wife of her husband. As a young girl, Saliha Husain was inspired by Surayyā Jabīn, another prominent character in the novel. But she writes that she "much later realized that the character which actually influenced me the most, in fact, which I unconsciously came to regard as my ideal was Mehr Jabīn only."[418] Moreover, the novel also acquired a legendary status amongst *ashraf* women, and was given in marriage as part of their dowries.[419]

Iqbāl Dulhan too received immense acclaim and attracted enthusiastic comments from Urdu literati. Reformer and Urdu novelist Nazīr Ahmad wrote that:

> whatever Iqbāl Mirza (protagonist) did was correct and this was what he ought to have done as someone born in a *sharīf* family….He has successfully shown the circumstances of the second *nikāh* as legitimate.[420]

Zaka Ullah (1832-1911), one of the most distinguished Muslim scholars of nineteenth century North India, said that

> the reasons for the necessity of a second marriage have been given in such a manner that an Indian educated in England who commits this would not be dubbed

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Taraqqi-ye Urdu, 1942). Some of his significant original writings are *National Culture of India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961); *Destiny of Indian Muslims* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965) *The Way of Gandhi and Nehru* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1959) and *Parda-i Gaflat* (The Veil of Ignorance) (Delhi: Maktaba Jamia, 1967).

[418] Saliha Abid Husain, *Silsala-i Roz-o-Shab*, 214.

[419] Qurratulain Hyder, *Kār-I Jahān Darāz Hai* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2003), 149-150.

[420] Bashīruddīn Ahmad, *Iqbāl Dulhan,* 274.

> as uncivilized even by a civilized European. The story is unprecedented in its didactic message both for men and women.[421]

Similarly, Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi (1846-1918) said that the author

> has established the second marriage as praiseworthy to the extent that there is no space of criticism even by the rationalist of Europe. Whatever he has written is commendable and to be dutifully obeyed by women and men.[422]

While novels like *Godar kā Lāl* and *Iqbāl Dulhan* legitimized polygyny and even received widespread acclaim, women writers in *Khātūn* and *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* illuminated a far more complex and different reality of women's lives.

Condemnation of Polygyny

Four years after the commencement of the journal *Khātūn,* Shaikh Abdullah in 1908 wrote that the magazine had initially focused all its efforts on advocating women's education but it now felt that there was an urgency to raise other issues in particular the reform of elaborate rituals, child marriages and polygyny. It especially called upon its readers to send their thoughts on these subjects and mentioned that a section in *Khātūn* would be devoted to these questions. [423] Encouraged by this note, the following month's issue witnessed its first article on polygyny by a woman simply called V.N Begum. She writes that problem of polygyny always seemed so irresolvable to her that she did not consider speaking much against it.[424] But after reading the words of the editor, she felt that what she believed to be hopeless wasn't and that influencing conditions was possible.

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[421] Ibid., 268.

[422] Ibid., 278-9.

[423] Editor, *Khātūn* Vol. 4 No. 4 (April 1908): 140.

[424] V.N Begum, "Saukan kā Jalāpā," (Jealousy of a Co-Wife) *Khātūn* Vol. 4 No. 5 (May 1908):166.

Claiming that *Khātūn* was extending an olive branch towards women, she noted that this opportunity should not be lost and that the journal provided the surety that the voices of women would reach several people. She called on other women to take encouragement, note incidents in their surroundings and send them to *Khātūn* for publication.[425]

V.N. Begum describes a tragic incident of polygynous marriage amongst her close family acquaintances. Mīr Wahid Alī, employed in the State of Hyderabad, was a man of considerable wealth and property. His daughter, Asghari, and V.N Begum were childhood friends and both families lived close to each other. Asghari's marriage was arranged to Mohsin, son of V.N Begum's maternal uncle, and the friendship between the two families was sealed further into a formal relationship.[426] Two years after Asghari's marriage, V.N Begum and her family left for Hijaz for six months to perform the Hajj. When they returned, V.N Begum was somewhat baffled because Asghari didn't meet her nor could be reached anywhere. Upon enquiry, V.N Begum discovered that Asghari's mother-in-law had remarried Mohsin to Fatima, daughter of Mohsin's maternal uncle and his first cousin. Mohsin's mother had always wanted the match to be arranged to Fatima but Fatima was eleven and Mohsin was twenty when he married Asghari. Due to Fatima's young age, they could not be married then and though his mother was willing to wait, there was pressure in the family for Mohsin's marriage. Two years after Mohsin's first marriage, his mother forced Mohsin into a union of her desire and he remarried Fatima to respect his mother's wishes. [427]

[425] Ibid., 167.
[426] Ibid., 169-71.
[427] 169-73.

Following Mohsin's marriage to Fatima, Asghari's health started to deteriorate and she barely ate or met people. V.N Begum continued to visit her everyday and Mohsin also met her regularly but her recovery to full health seemed unlikely. Writing in 1908, V.N Begum mentions that her friend Asghari passed away eighteen years ago in 1890 and had expressed her desire in their final meeting that V.N Begum narrate the story to the world so that there may be some prevention in the future. [428]

After the publication of V.N Begum's article, *Khātūn* received several stories about polygyny similarly titled *'Saukan kā Jalāpā,'* (Jealousy of a Co-wife), and the editors worried about the veracity of each one. When they published the next tale about the jealousy of a co-wife, they had to verify its accuracy and inform apprehensive readers that it was true. In this story, the first wife, Mehr-un-nissā belonged to a wealthy family and her marriage was arranged to a man named Shafiq. Shafiq, however, wished to marry another woman, Bashir-un-nissā but the wealthy status of Mehr-un-nissā's family and the prospect of a good dowry made Mehr-un-nissā a greater attraction for Shafiq's parents and he was thus married to Mehr-un-nissa. [429] After the death of his parents, Shafiq left his hometown and his wife to work in another town. Months would pass without any contact between Mehr-unnisa and Shafiq till Shafiq arrived home with his second wife, Bashir-unnisa.

In their life, writes the author, Mehr-un-nissā and Bashīr-un-nissā hardly ever met and Shafiq had no relationship with Mehr-un-nissā. Mehr-unnisa remained lonely and often in poor health suffering from extreme mood swings and depression. Within the neighborhood, some people believed that she was afflicted with madness and was

[428] Ibid., 176.
[429] R. Begum, "Saukan kā Jalāpa," *Khātūn* Vol. 4 No. 8 (August 1908): 293-94.

confined to the house for safety. Besides criticizing polygyny, the author makes a plea against non-consensual marriages and requests parents that they do not force their choices upon their children. [430] What is important to note in the lives of Mehr-un-nissā, Bashīr-un-nissā and Shafiq is that the family including the in-laws, parents and the couple are not living in one town. Movement generated by modern education and colonial employment not only allowed marriages to be across regions but also generated conditions of familial separation, of distance from parents and children and significantly from husband and wife. Different wives could live in different familial settings including either with their parents or their in-laws or just their husbands as a couple in separate towns.

One of the most dominant features about the debate on polygyny was that it highlighted the increasing number of such marriages amongst the educated elite of the Muslim community especially those who were educated abroad. Sympathizing with educated men, Amina Khātūn, wife of Abbās Tyabji, wrote that one can't expect Indian men who encounter educated and capable women in Europe to live, upon their return to India, with an uneducated and ill mannered first wife. [431] There would be no 'compatibility' between them and the best way to prevent such marriages was not to assign blame but to ensure that women too receive a good education so that husband and wife are both agreeable to each other. [432] While regretting the incidents of educated polygynous marriages, Amina Khātūn nevertheless refrained from criticizing the educated elite and advocated women's education as a solution to the growing problem.

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[430] Ibid., 301-302.
[431] Amina Khātūn, "Kasrat-ī Izdivāj," (Polygyny) *Ismat* Vol. 1 No. 6 (November 1908): 43.
[432] Ibid., 44-5.

Four years later, Razia Masūd Hasan reignited the issue accusing categorically the educated members of the community for deceptive and fraudulent conduct towards women.

In 1912, Razia Masūd Hasan, a regular contributor to *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* provoked a debate when she questioned the assumption that modern, educated men friendly to women's issues would also adopt a similar approach in their personal and familial life. Razia Masūd Hasan writes that for a long time, she thought that men who marry when their first wife is alive despise freedom and are not educated or progressive. But an incident involving second polygynous marriage by an educated man occurred which refuted her thinking, and she laments that if those who give speeches and organize movements for women are themselves guilty of such behavior, then one can't expect better conduct from ordinary people. [433]

Although Razia Masūd Hasan refrains from mentioning names, she gives clues to the personal history of the man. Receiving a university education both at home and in England, the man had remarried upon his return from England. The first wife, without a home, was entirely dependent upon her husband for money and was raising four children on a meager maintenance of 15 rupees per month. What further worsened the situation was that she had sold her jewelry to contribute significant finances towards her husband's foreign education. In anger, Razia Masūd Hasan asks:

> Can there be no justice for such a woman? Will educated men within the four corners of their home with pretensions of friendship towards women illegally oppress women like this only? Can no one redress the grievance of this helpless

[433] Razia Masūd Hasan, "Dosrī shādī tālīm-yāfta naujavānon mein," (Second Marriage amongst Educated Youth) *TN* Vol. 15 No. 42 (19 October 1912): 513.

one? Does no one have the courage and the audacity to present to the community (*qaum)* this oppressed one who transformed an incapable person into an educated member of the community (*qaum*)? And that the community (*qaum*) or at least its well wishers improve the condition of this grief-stricken one? No, nothing is possible. Within the home, every man can engage in horrific conduct towards women. There can be no check.[434]

There were several responses to Razia Masūd Hasan's article beginning with the editor Mumtāz Alī himself. Mumtāz Alī says that although Razia Masūd Hasan mentions only one incident of an educated polygynous marriage, he had noted several of them in the last few years. [435]According to him, many of those men who received an education abroad returned to marry another woman. As a solution, he suggests that of the vast amounts of money spent in arranging a foreign education, some should also be considered for the education of the wife so that when the husband completes his education, he will find greater compatibility with a woman who is educated like him. To ensure that both husband and wife are educated and remain in a monogamous union, he counsels that before husbands depart to another country for a better education, wives should make plans for their own education as well.

From Mumtāz Alī's analysis, it becomes clear that the changes that occurred under colonial rule such as the introduction of modern education, a bureaucratic framework and the rise of a professional class transformed family relations often at a high expense for

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[434] Ibid., 514.

[435] Mumtāz Alī, "tālīm yāfta naujavānon mein dosrī shādi kī rok," (The Prevention of Second Marriage amongst Educated Youth) *TN* Vol. 15 No. 42 (19 October 1912): 515.

women. In an ironical outcome, second marriage became *more* prevalent amongst Muslim men especially those who espoused liberal values about women's issues when they received a modern education in a Western country and had exposure to women in British and European societies. What is more remarkable is that Amina Khātūn's and Razia Masūd Hasan's arguments reveal that the notion of 'incompatible marriage' in Akbarī Begum's *Godar kā Lāl* was an ideological and didactic counterpart to similar transformations occurring in society, and that the spread of modern education produced mixed results for women.

Besides women's education, Mumtāz Alī also writes that the parents should vow that they will not arrange or force polygynous marriages of their daughters to well-educated men. If, however, despite all such measures, polygynous marriages do take place, such families, says Mumtāz Alī, should be condemned in society. [436] Societal condemnation of polygynous marriages, writes Mumtāz Alī, would require moral courage and not simply inner sensitivity to these problems. Unfortunately that quality, he says, is squarely lacking in the community (*qaum*) where the courage "to bear suffering upon self for the benefit of others called selflessness is present neither in men nor in women of the community. Only God is the caretaker of such a community and its deeds."[437]

Besides the editor, other women writers also expressed their agreement with Razia Masūd Hasan claiming that they knew not one but several instances of educated polygynous marriages. One woman wrote that if one were to visit the homes of these educated men and witness their attitude towards their wives, one would not believe that they are the same individuals who wrote an article favorable to women in a newspaper or

[436] Ibid., 516
[437] Ibid., 517.

presented a highly progressive speech at a conference.[438] She says that every excuse from ill education and ignorance of the first wife to her ordinary appearance to lack of children has been made to justify polygyny but one still routinely encounters polygynous unions when no such reasons exist. Arguing against such views, she writes that

> Followers of justice should nevertheless reflect. Tell us if the first wives are as criminal as the punishment meted out to them. These examples of foreign educated men are not simply heartbreaking but also worthy of reproach. [439]

She further adds that she earlier thought that a foreign education had a positive impact on people because her sister's husband had been educated abroad and was of excellent character. But with rising cases of second marriages amongst educated men, she was now unsure about this assumption. On a recent visit to Delhi, she became closely acquainted with women of several *sharīf* ('respectable') families and they all expressed surprise that her brother-in-law attended to her sister's happiness even after returning from England. When she enquired why such a relationship was surprising, she was presented with names of husbands with second wives. Expressing her disgust, she says

> the heart doesn't feel like hiding the names of such men, and this (exposing them) is a necessary step to undertake. The curtain of deception should be lifted and those who want to know should know that in today's age, there is no true friend of women.[440]

Endorsing Mumtāz Alī's suggestions, she writes that parents should take a principled vow that they would not arrange their daughter's marriage to a married man, and if men

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[438] Bint Rāashiuddīn Ahmad, "dosrī shādī tālīm yāfta naujavānon mein," *TN* Vol. 15 No. 42 (16 November 1912): 555.
[439] Ibid., 556
[440] Ibid., 557.

can't adhere to this rule, then women must assert it in their lives. At the same time, she also expressed doubt about such support from women saying that young girls are either counseled to be friends to their husband's first wife or to abandon them completely. Noting her disillusionment, she mentions that there was considerable debate against polygyny when *Khātūn* published *Saukan kā Jalāpā* some years ago but nothing much had changed, and the deplorable conditions of first wives was still the same. She despaired that the conversation triggered by Razia Masūd Hasan would also suffer a similar fate. [441]

In addition to highlighting issues raised by Razia Masūd Hasan, some also expressed their immediate, visceral reaction to her article. One woman from the town of Badayun wrote that after reading Razia Masūd Hasan's article, she sat silently in disbelief for several hours. [442] In her article, she mentioned an instance where the first wife died after discovering her husband's second marriage. After her death, instead of a happy conjugal union, the man had become caught in legal troubles amid scandals of licentious conduct and acquired notoriety in the community due to his extra-marital affairs.[443] Noting that the 'sighs of the oppressed are never wasted,' the author called the man's misfortune a consequence of his cruelty and asked readers to "continue creating furor in newspapers so that even if nothing happens, at least the voices of the oppressed would have reached the common public." [444]

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[441] Ibid., 558.
[442] Aik Badayun, "Zulm bebas auraton par," (Oppression of Helpess Women) *TN* Vol. 15 No. 47 (23 November 1912): 567.
[443] Ibid., 568.
[444] Ibid., 569.

Fatima Sughrā, another well-known writer in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* also expressed her anger at the practice of second marriages. Highlighting the contradictions inherent in such habits of educated people, she says:

> Alas, there hasn't even been any effect of education on our community (*qaum)*. The familial life of uneducated ones is still better because whatever they do, they do it openly. They immediately face an onslaught of taunts and rebuke, and they do fear such a reaction. But educated and respectable people behind the guise of concern commit such oppression that the thought of it decimates humanity. Alas, how many more incidents should we reveal. There are not incidents anymore but conditions of our everyday life. [445]

Digressing from the specific question of polygyny, Fatima Sughrā also presented general incidents of abusive marriages. In one situation, the husband had prevented the wife from visiting her parents, whom she had not seen in years. In another more serious one, a wife had committed suicide after years of abusive marriage, which was followed by the death of her child and her father within a year. Reprimanding further the conduct of educated men, Fatima Sughrā writes:

> Our brothers only know how to give speeches in conferences. But they carry some other reality in their hearts. Any brother who goes to England returns to the country with a future life plan and as soon as they return, they begin to do their business accordingly. One slips in despair when one thinks how conditions of women can be improved. Our days are spent restlessly and our nights are without sleep. [446]

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[445] Fatima Sughrā, "dosrī shādī tālīm yāfta naujavānon mein," *TN* Vol. 15 No. 9 (7 December 1912): 594.
[446] Ibid., 595.

The debate initiated in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* also found its echo in other journals. Writing in *Khātūn,* one author agreed with Razia Masūd Hasan saying that the new education of men not only proved unhelpful for women but was also damaging because almost all men who were educated in England unjustly chose to have a second wife. [447] The author also criticized one of the marriages (of Sharif-un-nissā) reported in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* under its routine idealized description of marriage. *Tahzīb* had highlighted the austere nature of the marriage unadulterated by unnecessary rituals but the author mockingly asks if the groom could have performed any rituals given that he was a married man with six children. [448] Claiming that the groom abandoned the ritual of justice more than any other ritual at his wedding, the author writes

> And this is that abandonment for which the community (*qaum*) should shed tears of blood. Out of all things, justice is the reason because of which Europe today is wearing its elegant dress of culture and capability. This is that ritual because of which the inhabitants of small island of Britain today are ruling over half of the world. And this is the same ritual due to which Islam had acquired its magnificence and greatness in the past.[449]

The notion of a perfect era of justice and harmony situated in the early period of Islam expressed here was not unusual in reformist discourse and one of its most famous articulations was Hālī's *Musaddas* written in the nineteenth century. Most Muslims concerned for the well-being of the community during the colonial period carried a strong sense of loss not necessarily of political power but of virtue especially those related to

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[447] A. Kh, "dosrī shādī tālīm yāfta naujavānon mein," *Khātūn* Vol. 10 No. 1(January 1913): 10.
[448] Ibid., 10.
[449] Ibid., 11.

justice, intellectual curiosity and general world awareness. Keeping her focus on Islamic history, the author adds:

> O my religious brethren, remember that the sighs of angry hearts are never wasted. But that the river of tears that flows from such weeping takes the shape of vapors and reaches the sky to become clouds of calamity and cruelty, which torrent the world of Islam. This is that hail which swept away the grand forts of Turkey, this is that hail at whose harshness armies became senseless and fled, yes, this is that hail because of which Afghanistan today trembles from head to toe and Iran is on the brink for life. And everyone knows the state of Indian Muslims, it doesn't need to be mentioned. [450]

These potent words reveal not just a sense of disillusionment with Indian Muslims but with Muslims everywhere and demonstrate that Indian Muslims followed processes of reform not just in their own country but also in other parts of the Islamic world. According to the author, Muslims have come to consider the oppression of women an ordinary matter, and she chastises Mumtāz Ali for idealizing Sharif-un-nissā's marriage. Enforcing his view that those who commit polygyny must be condemned in society, she accuses him of shaky principles and of weak commitment to his own values.[451]

As in any debate, there weren't just those who opposed polygyny but also those who felt that educated men were being treated harshly in these articles. Some felt that women should give permission to their husbands to remarry because it was an Islamic practice and thus promoted Islam. They argued that in no law or religion could a woman dictate over a man and that if the wives could develop good relations with each other, they could

[450] Ibid., 12.
[451] Ibid., 14.

assist each other in moments of distress and worry. [452] Women responded to these arguments in different ways. Some invoked the concept of 'legitimate polygyny' refraining from absolute condemnation of polygyny whereas others like Razia Masūd Hasan expressed greater outrage at the possibility of defending polygyny.

Within the reasoning of 'legitimate polygyny,' some argued that such marriages could be acceptable only when one could act justly with all wives, or if there was a 'necessary' condition such as medical infertility of the first wife. [453] Moving beyond the marital dyad, children were also a concern in polygynous marriages. If the husband had a modest income, then supporting his wives and all their children was a near impossibility, and in those cases, polygynous marriages would only raise people of poor education and weak character. [454]

Razia Masūd Hasan expressed her dismay at these arguments targeting in particular the article by Ahliya Shamsuddīn Haider. She wrote that she was upset "not because it was opposed to my views but because it runs a knife across women's throats and inclines men towards polygyny for no rhyme or reason."[455] She was even doubtful about its authorship and wondered if a man wrote it. Questioning the author's choice of words with the title '*dosrī shādī kī bejā shikāyat'* (the unnecessary complaint against polygyny), she accused the author of inattentiveness towards issues and requested her to reread previous articles against polygyny to decide if complaints against it were unnecessary. Dismissing the

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[452] Ahliya Shamsuddīn Haider, "dosrī shadī kī beja shikāyat," (The Unnecessary Complaint against Second Marriage) *TN* Vol. 16 No. 2 (11 January 1913): 19.
[453] Khair-un-nissā Begum, "dosrī shādī ki beja himāyat," (The Unnecessary Support of Second Marriage) *TN* Vol. 16 No. 5 (1 February 1913): 55-56.
[454] Ibid., 56-7.
[455] Razia Masūd Hasan, "dosrī shādī kī bejā himāyat," *TN* Vol. 16 No. 6 (8 February 1913): 61.

idea that such practices aided Islam, she said that the conditions of unfairness and cruelty generated by polygyny were adding to the humiliation of Islam instead of promoting it. She finally expressed her disillusionment with the magazine editor and questioned its stance in promoting the rights of women if it was willing to publish such views saying that "the silence of the editor suggests that he did not consider this article to be offensive." [456] In response to Razia Hasan's allegations, Mumtāz Alī wrote that the views shared by Ahliya Shamsuddīn Haider were so absurd that if he had engaged in their rebuttal, the article could have acquired some respectability. [457]

The religious sanction for polygyny was a point of continuous confrontation and not resolved amicably. Women argued that polygyny was necessary not only for the propagation of the family but also for generating *taraqqī* (progress) in the Muslim community.[458] Citing religious reasons, they wrote that "this issue is a command of God, to oppose it means to disobey God and to compete with him." [459] Moreover, they said that history provided sufficient evident to show that polygyny was not only practiced amongst non-Muslim communities in many parts of the world but before Islam as well. [460]

In their critiques of such views, women clarified and re-interpreted the understanding of permission and sanction in a religious tradition. Comparing polygyny to divorce, one woman wrote that Islam permits divorce but "does this mean that all men should divorce their wives to obey this command?" [461] According to her, polygyny was permissible only

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[456] Ibid., 65.
[457] Ibid., 65.
[458] Bashrī Begum, "Ta'adud-i Izdivāj," (Polygyny) *TN* Vol. 24 No. 47 (19 November 1921): 738.
[459] Bashrī Begum, "Ta'adud-e Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 24 No. 48 (26 November 1921): 754.
[460] Ibid., 755.
[461] Ahmadī Begum, "Ta'adud-e Izdivaj," *TN* Vol. 24 No. 50 (10 December 1921): 785.

under special conditions particularly war when several women could be widowed and children orphaned. In fact, there was a brief mention of the possibility of introducing polygyny in Western societies due to the damage inflicted during the years of the First World War. [462]

Writings on polygyny also brought out internal sectarian differences amongst Muslims. When a follower of Ahmadi faith presented Ghulam Ahmed as an example of exemplary married life of monogamy, others disagreed claiming that Ghulam Ahmed would not oppose an Islamic injunction and polygyny was permissible amongst Ahmadis in the same way as other Muslims.[463] In response to this division, Mumtāz Alī proposed a view of Quranic foundationalism arguing that writers should articulate their position not based on the conduct of elders or pious figures of the past but on their own interpretation of the Qurān. [464]

The children born of polygynous marriages in addition to the treatment of the first wife was also a serious concern in these debates. Many pointed out that fathers who remarried could not be trusted to have the custody of children of their first wives, and in the absence of a father figure, these children were raised with the psychological trauma of a distant and an uncaring father. [465]

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, women's magazine especially *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* thus became a forum for a discourse largely alternate to 'legitimate polygyny.'

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[462] Vakīl, "Jung aur Kasrat-i Izdivāj," (War and Polygyny) *Ismat* Vol. 14 No. 4 (April 1915): 43-9.
[463] Hajra, "Ta'adud-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 24 No. 52 (24 December 1921): 829.
[464] Mumtāz Alī, "Ta'adud-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 25 No. 2(14 January 1922): 24.
[465] Arzī Begum, "Kasrat-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 36 No. 27 (8 July 1933): 674.

Novels too shared this outlook and Nazr Sajjād Hyder's *Ah-i Mazlumān* (Sighs of the Oppressed) published around 1912 adopted an unequivocal stance towards polygyny.

Ah-i Mazlumān contains two parallel stories each depicting a situation of polygyny. Neither story ends tragically but none of them close with friendship between the husband and the co-wives. The plot revolves around two households, one is that of Deputy Sahib, and the other is that of Munshi Hidayatullah. The novel opens with Deputy informing his wife, Sultanat Ārā, about his transfer to the town of Rawalpindi from Ludhiana, the town of residence of Deputy and his wife. He specifically asks his wife to leave for Agra, where her family resides while he arranges basic living facilities at Rawalpindi. Meanwhile, in the second household of Munshi Hidaytaullah, we are introduced to his wife Abadī Begum, his son Azmatullah, and her daughter-in-law Zubaida. Azmatullah has two sisters and one brother Shafiullah. Munshi Hidayatullah is the patriarch of the family. In this family, Zubaida is severely ill-treated by her mother-in-law Abadī Begum to the extent that she is forced to live in the small room outside the main house which is also used for storage and is a shed for animals. The stories of these two households accentuate the cruelty of husbands towards their wives and aim to intensify the exclusion and alienation experienced by the first wife.

In the family of Munshi Hidayatullah, Abadī Begum decides to arrange a second marriage for her son to her wealthy niece Khurshīd Begum. This is borne out of her malice towards Zubaida and a desire to acquire a wealthier status through the son's marriage to a rich family.[466]

[466]Nazr Sajjād Hyder, Ah-i Mazlumān, in *Hawā-i Chaman Mein Khemā-i Gul,* ed. Quratualain Hyder (reprint) (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2004): 375.

Meanwhile in the family of Deputy, Sultanat Ārā moves to live with her family in Agra. After a few days, she is distressed and reveals to her sister, Tamkanat Ārā, that her husband has stopped writing any letters and ceased all contact with her. Worried, she decides to leave Agra and comes to Rawalpindi with her son Fazrul Rahman and her two domestic helps. When she reaches Rawalpindi, she discovers that her husband has had a second marriage to a woman named Zarren Jān.[467] Both Sultanat Ārā and Zarren Jān live together in the same house with much bitterness and angst amongst them. After a few days, Zarren Jān falls ill and insists that she live separately from Deputy's wife. Deputy manages an independent living arrangement for her in an adjacent house, and divides his time between the two wives. For most part, his feelings are for Zarren Jān. While the two wives dislike each other, Sultanat Ārā pretends friendship in front of everybody.

In the first household, Hidayatullah dies and the family plunges into a financial crisis. To escape penury and its stresses, Khurshīd Begum and Azmatullah leave to stay at Khurshīd begum's family and have a daughter together. Within a few days of childbirth, however, Khurshīd suffers from severe post-delivery ailments and dies. Afterwards, Azmatullah returns to his father's house. Throughout this time, he has not kept in touch with his mother or siblings. Faced by the strain of poverty, the health of both Abadī Begum and Azmatullah start to wane to the extent that they become bedridden. Zubaida returns to take care of them and moved by Zubaida's compassion, Abadī Begum realizes her mistake in marrying off Azmatullah. Zubaida forgives Abadī Begum and her son, and the monogamous marriage of Zubaida and Azmatullah is restored [468]

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[467]Ibid., 378.

Meanwhile, in the Deputy's house, Sultanat Ārā's health also starts to decline rapidly. Concerned for her isolation and her well-being, her brother-in-law Rashid Mulk decides to arrive at Rawalpindi and escorts her back to Agra. Sultanat Ārā moves back to live with her family while Deputy is married and living with Zarren Jān. Meanwhile, there is a robbery at Deputy's house in which he is assaulted by the robbers. A financial crisis is created when Deputy is unable to work due to injuries incurred in the attack. In the climax of the novel, Zarren Jān flees the house with jewelry and money. When Sultanat Ārā discovers that Deputy is in poor health and penury, she volunteers to help. Sultanat Ārā's care and generosity renews Deputy's affection and regard for her and they gradually return to their earlier married life.

Nazr Sajjād Hyder's position in *Ah-i Mazlumān* sets her apart from Bashīruddīn Ahmad and Akbarī Begum and brings her closer to Razia Masūd Hasan. The idea of polygyny as "Islamic" is not entertained at all and the happiness of the home is established only when the second wife is ousted. There is bitterness and misunderstanding between the first and the second wife instead of friendship. Polygyny is absolutely rejected, and at the end of the novel, Nazr Sajjād Hyder makes a plea on 'behalf' of first wives and women. Referring to polygyny as an "illegitimate marriage," she described its prevalence amongst Muslims as a "blizzard" and denounced the community for not paying enough attention for "there are numerous leaders and

[468]Ibid., 393-96.

reformers in the community but nobody is concerned about its prevention."[469] She also criticized the discourse of "adjustment" that was common to the rhetoric of polygyny:

> Our truthful reality is that "oppressor hits and does not let us wail." The injunction for us is "we oppress, you endure. We hit, you do not weep nor utter a word of censure. Just combust and crush inside but don't wince."… We obedient, ill-treated ones even agree to this and do not mention our grievances and demands, which are our rights. In fact we think that it is inappropriate or disrespectable. When it becomes excruciating, then we forbear very quietly with a sigh. In such a state, what can we ourselves do? Therefore, it is a humble request of not only hundreds but thousands of heartbroken women to our honest, sincere fathers. Our true brothers! For God's sake, have mercy on us and first and foremost, before anything else, take note of us. Then we will also call you reformers. Otherwise, what does it matter to us how many reforms you bring? Our lives are getting burned, crush and destroyed.[470]

Nazr Sajjād Hyder's concern with polygyny expressed itself not just in her novel but also in her journal writings. In addition to *Ah-i Mazlumān,* she wrote a short story 'Yes, I'm also his wife' addressing the issue of polygyny. In the story, there are two female strangers who meet while travelling in the train and start a conversation. After visiting her sister, Mehbūb Sultan is travelling from Amritsar in Punjab to Peshawar in modern

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[469]Nazr Sajjād Hyder, Ah-i Mazlumān*,* in *Hawā-I Chaman Mein Khemā-i Gul,* ed. Quratualain Hyder (reprint) (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2004): 448.

[470]Ibid., 448-49.

Pakistan, where her parents live. The other woman, simply named Begum, is travelling from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh to Jhelum in Punjab, Pakistan where her in-laws reside. [471]

During the course of their conversation, we discover that Begum has not seen her husband, Mirza Alīmullāh, in two years because of his transfer in employment from Jhelum and she has thus been living only with her in-laws. Mehbūb Sultan, on the other hand, has been living with her husband in Quetta (Pakistan) and has hardly visited her in-laws. Mehbūb Sultan is the second wife of her husband who is a medical doctor. Her marriage was arranged when her husband was based in Peshawar and became closely associated with her brother. While Mehbūb Sultan's parents opposed the marriage, the husband pursued the match and it was eventually arranged. [472]

When the train arrives in Jhelum and Begum is about to disembark, the reader learns that Mehbūb Sultan's husband is also Mirza Alīmullāh and that Begum is his first wife. The Begum believed that her husband moved to another town because of his shift in employment and is shocked to discover that he had instead remarried secretly in Peshawar. Mehbūb Sultan, on the other hand, had never seen Mirza Alīmullāh's first wife and was living with him in Quetta. In the conclusion of the story, Nazr Hyder writes that such stories are neither new nor rare and are heard routinely causing extreme oppression amongst women. [473] What is important to note here is that the different homes of the two wives in Quetta and Jhelum resembles the lives of Mehr-un-nissā and Bashīr-un-nissā,

[471] Nazr-ul Bāqr "hān, main bhī unhe kī bīwī hūn," *Khātūn* Vol. 6 No. 9 (September 1910): 386-87.
[472] Ibid., 388-90.
[473] Ibid., 391-92.

and that the narration in short stories and novels in the Urdu press was based in no small measure on an emerging historical reality.

Much of the issues raised by women in the journals *Khātūn, Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ah-i Mazlumān* coalesced during the fifth All India Muslim Ladies Conference of 1918 held in Lahore. The conference was attended by almost four hundred women from a large number of cities including Lahore, Allahabad, Lucknow, Aligarh, Bulandshahr, Delhi, Meerut, Bhopal, Peshawar, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Sialkot, Rawalpindi and Jammu.[474] One of the highlights of conference was that it passed a resolution condemning polygyny. The words of the resolution were:

> In the view of this conference, the progress of the community is extremely hindered by that practice of polygyny prevalent amongst some classes, which is opposed to the Quranic injunction and the correct principles of Islam. It is the duty of educated women, within their own domain of influence, that they make efforts to eliminate this custom. [475]

An address given by Jahān Ārā Shāhnawāz at the conference called the custom of plural marriages one of the most shameful acts of oppression in Islam and a practice that was increasing among the best educated and most influential class of young Muslims.[476] The speech was met with applause by other women at the conference and one of the attendees

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[474] Marguerite Walter, "The All India Moslem Ladies Conference," *Muslim World* 9, 2 (April 1919): 169. Also see Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars,* 145-46, 283-91.

[475] Mumtāz Alī, "Lahore Ladies Conference," *TN* Vol. 21 No. 14 (April 1914): 224.

[476] Jahān Ārā mentions this conference only briefly in a paragraph in her autobiography saying that the resolution was passed unanimously and "brought about a storm of protest and a number of other articles appeared in the papers calling me all sorts of names." Jahān Ārā Shāhnawāz *Father and Daughter: A Political Autobiography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), reprint, 47-48.

even called for legislation to abolish polygyny much like sati. But Jahan Ara was accused of insulting Islam and speaking under the influence of Christian missionaries and modern education.[477] In her defense, Jahān Ārā wrote that she did not present the resolution "for the sake of praise and acclaim. But that the thought of improving the conditions of Muslim sisters compelled me to accept being the target of hate and reproach."[478] Jahān Ārā understood that speaking publicly on the issue of polygyny in a conference would provoke and aggravate several people but felt equal determination to highlight the problem. She says

> Alas, what am I to do. Nature has put such a heart in me that when a pain arises in it, its lament and sigh should reach the throne of God.[479]

Claiming that not a week had gone by in years when an incident of polygyny had not come to her notice, she described first wives as "living deaths of that old education and rearing whom our modern educated elders could not like simply because the women had not been molded in the frame of Westernization."[480] Much like Razia Masūd Hasan and Mumtāz Alī, Jahān Ārā's point here highlights the consequences of a confrontation between different styles of self-fashioning and disparate systems of education.

Jahān Ārā also mentions that after reading the resolution, an old woman came up on stage to express her gratitude and congratulated her. She finally enjoins men to support her saying that, "O brothers of Islam, do not cause such accusations to your pure and true

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[477] Marguerite Walter, "The All India Moslem Ladies Conference," *Muslim World* 9, 2 (April 1919): 172-74.
[478] Jahān Ārā, "Muslim Ladies Conference aur Izdivāj Sānī," (Muslim Ladies Conference and Polygyny) *TN* Vol. 21 No. 17 (27 April 1918): 264.
[479] Ibid., 264-5.
[480] Ibid., 265.

religion from which it is above" and to "save the sinking ship of the community and not deprive women of God given rights." [481] A distinctive feature about Jahān Ārā's plea is that it doesn't leave the religious domain and articulates women's rights within a discourse of 'true' and 'pure' Islam.

Different women writers supported Jahan Ara's efforts and the resolution of the conference. Expressing her anger at the suffering of first wives, Asgharī Khānum, an attendee of the conference, asks, "O, brothers of Islam, is this the justice based on which our modern educated elders express their rousing support for the custom of polygyny?"[482] Highlighting the difference between the attitude of men and women towards polygyny, she says that "you support polygyny only and just only because it is your religious tenet but our opposition is based not just on the fact that its current practice is contrary to our religious principles but also because this is causing great oppression to our group."[483] Even though there may be some men who show support for women, Asgharī Khānum writes that the strength of these is negligible and many amongst them loose their courage on issues like polygyny because here "instead of enjoying their own rights, they have to also protect the rights of women."[484] She adds that such men "may fill pages of their books portraying the oppressive and poor conditions of women but when the moment comes for action, instead of support, they get ready for opposition."[485] Countering the critics of the conference, she questioned if any had read the resolution or Jahān Ārā's speech and if not, they then had no right to spread false rumors and malign the

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[481] Ibid., 268.
[482] Asgharī Khānum, "All India Muslim Ladies Conference par Aitrazāt, " (Objections to the Muslim Ladies Conference) *TN* (20 April): 246.
[483] Ibid., 246.
[484] Ibid., 247.
[485] Ibid., 247.

conference. She also doubted the possibility of a just polygynous union saying that no man nowadays had shown any fairness towards both wives and they were only inventing excuses to remarry. [486]

The most central point in Asgharī Khānum's reports and perhaps in the entire debate on the conference was religiosity particularly an emphasis on correct practice and a contentious conversation on what constituted 'Islamic' or 'un-Islamic.' In her rejoinder, Jahān Ārā wrote

> In the guise of the great religion of Islam, pain far removed from any humanism was inflicted on helpless women. Can we account for these women, who have become imprisoned for their entire life by the oppressive consequences of being co-wives and having cruel families? [487]

Addressing the critic's charge that the resolution was un-Islamic, Asgharī Khānum asked if the tenets of Islam were now limited only to polygyny and if other practices like prayer, charity, fasting and Hajj had lost their significance. She claimed that young educated men who were engaging in polygynous marriages had little regard for Islam except to remarry but that the elders within the community had no courage to criticize them and call them un-Islamic. [488]

Deliberating on religion further, Asgharī Khānum writes that what impressed non-Muslim women at the conference the most was the participants passion for their faith. According to her, there wasn't a discussion of an issue in which there wasn't a first and

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[486] Ibid., 248.
[487] Jahān Ārā, "Muslim Ladies Conference aur Izdivaj Saani," (Muslim Ladies Conference and Polygyny) *TN* Vol. 21 No. 17 (27 April 1918): 265.
[488] Asgharī Khānum, "Muslim Ladies Conference par Aitrazāt," *TN* (11 May 1918): 299.

foremost mention of religion. [489] Expressing her views on religion, she writes, "can there be any greater trait than religion, which is dear and worthy of respect in this world? Religion is the soul of the life of the community."[490] To pacify her critics, she further adds

> O elders of the community, have faith that as long as there is Islam in the world, no Muslim woman will disobey the commands of her dear religion. A Muslim woman takes better care of her religion than all the blessings of the world, and why not? Isn't this the faith that provided her with greater freedom and rights than all the other faiths of the world.[491]

As we note in these words of Asgharī Khānum, much of the condemnation of polygyny was also a strong attempt by women to appropriate their religion and assert it against an exclusive male monopolization. These women did not posses any form of 'sacred authority' in the community and though their proclamations took special care not to offend religious sentiments and were even similar to views expressed by some men, the act of a public declaration by a woman not endowed with sacred authority in favor of another religious interpretation could not be easily accepted and had to be repeatedly rationalized and explained to prevent miscommunication. The discourse of 'Islamic feminism' prominent here and in many other issues that were covered in the Urdu press, therefore, cannot be read in a uniform way but must be subjected to a more critical interrogation involving who speaks it, where and to whom.

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[489] Asgharī Khānum, "Muslim Ladies Conference par Aitrazāt," *TN* (18 May 1918): 312.
[490] Ibid., 312.
[491] Ibid., 312-13.

Besides stirring controversy about the nature of Islamic practice, the conference also placed a venerable figure within reformist circles on the spotlight. Asgharī Khānum felt that the most disappointing reaction to the conference was the opposition from Rāshid-ul Khairī. Rāshid-ul Khairī felt that bringing the resolution against polygyny publicly in front of non-Muslim women was inappropriate because it created an impression of an oppressive Islam amongst non-Muslims who may know nothing. [492] Refuting this charge, Asgharī Khanum argued that the effect of the resolution amongst any non-Muslim, if present there, would have been contrary to what Rāshid-ul Khairī supposed because they would have realized that the current practice of polygyny exists only to appease desire and is contrary to Muslim ethics.[493]

Debate about Rāshid-ul Khairī's views continued several months after the conference. A woman called wife of Mushtāq Hussain sent a detailed critique of Khairī's opposition to the conference resolution saying that she felt puzzled why someone who had devoted his life to writing about the ordeals of women would be antagonistic to the resolution. She directed her grievance particularly at Khairī saying that the rest of the opponents didn't matter because, unlike him, they had not promised any friendship towards women.[494] Attacking Khairī for his ambiguity, she says

> Does the painter of grief only like to draw out scenarios on paper and keep us happy through an imaginary album of paintings the way children are pacified by toys? What is the reason that he doesn't have mercy on us? Because if he did, then

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[492] Asgharī Khānum, "Muslim Ladies Conference par Aitrazāt," *TN* (11 May 1918), 300.
[493] Ibid., 300-01.
[494] Ahliya Mushtāq Hussain, "Insāf," (Justice) *TN* Vol. 24 No. 42 (15 October 1921): 661.

he would have shown some way to save us from these afflictions, or at least not opposed it. [495]

According to the author, by not supporting a solution against the problem of polygyny, Khairī was endorsing the view that women's suffering must be borne through perseverance and fortitude. Although she admired these virtues, she argued that in the absence of any resistance portrayed especially in Khairī's novels, they were a lie and against human nature. Even if adhering to them was part of duty, they weren't worthy of prescription. [496]

Following her views on Khairī's objection to the conference, the author then analyzes the impact of Khairī's novels on its readers and critiques them. Khairī's novels were known for depicting extremely harsh cruelty towards women where his female protagonists were paragons of virtue who bore everything stoically. According to the author, there are two effects of Khairī's novels and they are different for men and women. When women read them, they wish to emulate Khairi's female characters and think that when greater misery is afflicting other women, they must endure through their own without complaint. When men read these novels, says the author, they think that there are such women in the world who persevere without complaint, and on the other extreme is their wife who grumbles even over the smallest misconduct. Comparing their attitude to the cruelty of Khairi's male characters, they realize that they behave better and still have to bear a whiny wife. With such beliefs, they convince themselves to be the

[495] Ibid., 661.
[496] Ibid., 663.

oppressed and the wife to be the oppressor, and blame her for their injustice. Under such conditions, they do not hesitate to become harsher in their relationship. [497]

The author's penetrating insight about Khairi's novels is extremely significant because it potentially applies not only to Rāshid-ul Khairī but to the entire field of didactic and advice literature of social reform. Both women as well as men were involved in the production of didactic literature and these texts provided influential role models for women to emulate. But as the author notes, it also carried the risk of further entrenching abuse and promoted an attitude of silence and passivity instead of resistance amongst suffering women. Furthermore, these arguments also reveal that although didactic literature enjoyed great popularity amongst both men and women, it was not without objection and wasn't uncritically accepted in the community.

In concluding her argument, the author hopes that Khairī would not take offense at her views and invites him to join women in supporting the resolution. She also asks women to write with attention and veracity, and to abandon the view that human hearts can be so ideally stoic that they never feel. [498]

The first two decades of the twentieth century remain the most crucial years for discussion on polygyny much of which culminated in 1918 at the Lahore conference. But there is a striking shift in trend after 1920. In the years following the conference, articles addressing the issue of polygyny in women's magazines gradually waned. From the beginning, *Ismat's* main focus in marital issues was consent and child marriage with lesser attention on polygyny and after the early 20s, it practically became silent on the issue. *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* which had played such a central role in the debate in early

[497] Ibid., 664-665.
[498] Ibid., 665.

twentieth century, retained the interest but there were fewer writers concerned with this question. Perhaps the risk associated with maintaining the same burst of anger as that enclosed in articles and the conference was too high. The furor around the issue of polygyny was so disruptive that it went beyond prominent demands for greater women's education but assaulted the interconnected edifice of modern education, social reform, sacred authority and religious tradition. Moreover women advocating education and greater freedom in social life themselves were torn. They too desired men with the best education and a decent employment to ensure a stable familial life and more importantly a social ethic associated with 'respectability.' This conflict between their own values and what they desired is best expressed in the anguish experienced by Saliha Abid Hussain at her marriage.

When Saliha Abid Husain reflected back on her life, in particular her marriage to Abid Husain in 1933, she saw her "ideal" in Mehr Jabīn of *Gudar kā Lāl*, the prototype of the educated second wife. The first marriage of Abid Husain took place in 1917 and he felt that it was "incompatible" and forced onto him. His father pressured him to remarry when the first marriage produced no children. Abid Husain, however, ignored his father's demands and left for Europe to pursue higher education. Upon his return, his father insisted on a second marriage again but Abid Husain had no desire for children and considered polygyny inappropriate. Abid Husain started contemplating a second marriage when he felt deprived of all pleasures of marital life in particular companionship, domesticity and love.[499] When Saliha Husain received from him the offer of marriage, she deliberated as follows:

> It is likely that he wants to marry on the insistence of his father to produce a child. This is my insult. Does a girl have no personality of her own? Doesn't she have a worth of her own? Doesn't she have a right to be loved by herself? Is she merely an instrument for furthering a lineage? And then, what will happen to that self of mine, who in her assessment was even now a supporter of women's rights and wanted to propagate them through her pen. Should I grab the rights of another woman! No, no, how can it be![500]

Husain's doubts and dilemmas were cleared when she furtively read Abid Husain's letters to her sister-in-law. She discovered that Abid Husain was opposed to polygyny, that he had already obtained permission for this marriage from his first wife, that he would not legally divorce his first wife, that he would take responsibility for her and that no decision would be made until Saliha Husain agrees to the marriage.[501] Abid Husain's letters gave Saliha Husain the confidence to make the decision in favor of the marriage, and later in her life, she regarded Shafat, Abid Husain's first wife, as her sister and a friend. Saliha Husain writes that "for years, there was only one relation left between me and her: that of sisters….both of us had forgotten every other relation."[502] What is of great significance in Saliha Husain's marriage and also the narrative of *Gudar kā Lāl* is that it reveals that the mimicry of Victorian norms and the emulation of companionate marriage wasn't the only trajectory of "modern" marriage in India, that, as Tanika Sarkar

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[499] Saliha Abid Husain, *Silsala-i Roz-o Shab* , 149-51.

[500] Ibid., 115.

[501] Ibid., 118.

[502] Ibid., 218.

has argued, "the normative and moral horizons between the two cultural systems were so very different and distant that plain mimicry was plainly out of the question."[503]

One of the most salient features about the discourse on polygyny was that it was never monolithic but was characterized by constant flux and oscillation between ideas of suffering and fortitude, education and marital rights, nature and religion, history and change. 'Respectability' or '*sharāfat* remained a value of significance in the debate. The concern with procreation, as seen in Sayyid Ahmad and Bashīruddīn Ahmad, and continuation of the family line was a marker of respectability for the *ashraf* class. Childbearing was necessary to maintain a living memory of *sharīf* and high parentage. Polygyny in an infertile marriage can thus be seen as a process that allowed *ashraf* families to preserve their status and affirm their ancestry and family heritage.

Besides birth, polygyny was also associated with modern education both at the level of discourse as well as practice. In the ideology of social reform, Akbarī Begum believed that polygyny could resolve the dilemma of an "incompatible marriage" caused by discrepancy in education between the husband and the first wife. Marriage to an educated second wife would ensure that the house is efficiently maintained, that children are well brought up and most importantly the boundaries of *sharāfat* are not subverted. In practice, it was not unusual for men who received a modern education especially in England or Europe to desire a second wife who they believed was more suited and more amenable to their transformed lifestyle. Those who studied abroad were in most cases men of considerable wealth and status, and influenced markers of social respectability.

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[503] Tanika Sarkar, "*Strishiksha* or Education for Women" in *Women's Studies in India: A Reader,* ed. Mary E. John (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), 321.

Incidents of polygynous marriages thus accelerated amongst families at the forefront of reform.

The condemnation of polygyny contained in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and in the conference resolution strove to rupture the reformist discourse and highlight its inadequacies and its neglect of women's lives. Within the space of female journalism in Urdu print culture, it achieved some success in holding its own against the larger colonial conversation occupied with the acquisition of modern education and social status. But it was not able to preserve its intensity after its peak years and while reformers, both men and women alike, regarded polygyny as unacceptable, their familial lives often carried a more mixed reality.

Chapter 5: Separation and Divorce

Having explored notions of 'good' wife and husband in different kinds of discussion ranging from consent to appropriate marriageable age, to compatibility and polygyny, I now turn to the last topic in the debate on marriages: separation and divorce. A substantial portion of the articulations in women's magazines and Urdu novels highlighted the value of marriage and family to happiness, personal fulfillment and a good life. Not surprisingly, writers, if they tackled separation or worse divorce, presented them in a poor light and repeatedly emphasized these events as unfortunate and ill-fated for the individual's and family's life. In the genre of Urdu social novel, one encounters antagonistic views towards separation when one considers how those who separated from their spouses particularly women instead of living together are represented. In his novel, *Husn-i Ma'ashirat,* Bashīruddīn Ahmad presents a prototype of the ill-matched couple in the characters of Farkhanda and his ill-educated wife, Lādlī Begum. Farkhanda is a well-educated male from a respectable family based in Delhi and is employed as a Deputy Collector in the town of Meerut. His wife, Lādlī Begum, on the other hand, is characterized by ignorance and lack of education. She is arrogant and lazy in her behavior, lacks proper housekeeping skills and spends many of the initial days after her marriage at her mother's home instead of her in-laws home. [504] Furthermore, she has fights and arguments not only with her husband but also between herself and Sardar Begum, her mother-in-law.

Along with the descriptions of quarrels within the family, Bashīruddīn Ahmad inserts his own advice to women counseling them to be obedient and respectful of their husbands

[504] Bashīruddīn Ahmad, *Husn-i Ma'ashirat* (Agra: Matba Mufīd Aam, 1914): 52-64.

and his family. Comparing Indian women to western women, he says that "our women are in the control of their husbands and obedient to them in every way. They are not free and self-empowered like *memsahebs."* [505] Thus in the gendered ideology of Bashīruddīn Ahmād, obedience and submission to the figure of the husband constituted the character of the 'Indian' or the 'Muslim' woman as opposed to the '*memsaheb*' who had little understanding of familial obligation. In most didactic novels, the incompatible marriage born out of disparities in temperament and education is resolved through the efforts of the educated figure in the relationship. In *Husn-i Mu'ashirat,* however, Lādlī Begum, fails to demonstrate any proclivity towards self-improvement and instead leaves her in-laws' home to live with her mother. For two years, she and her husband Farkhanda live separately. Not surprisingly, since it is Ladli Begum who exits from the relationship, she and her family remain condemned figures in the eyes of the author, Bashīruddīn Ahmad. In describing the personality of Lādlī Begum's mother, Bashīruddīn Ahmad disapprovingly writes that she was such that she "would have arranged a divorce for her daughter but not arrange a reconciliation with Farkhanda." [506]

Expressing his views more clearly on divorce and separation, Bashīruddīn Ahmad lays the blame for the collapse of marriage squarely upon the conduct of Lādlī Begum. When Farkhanda's mother, for example, suggests that he approach Lādlī Begum and reconcile, he rejects her advice and refuses any efforts towards reconciliation saying that Lādlī left "without my permission and was self-empowered (*khud-mukhtār).*"[507] As the days and months pass, however, Lādlī Begum begins to miss marital bliss and feels lonely at her

[505] Ibid., 77.
[506] Ibid., 100.
[507] Ibid., 101.

mother's home. This also deteriorates her health and she finally realizes her mistake, and returns to Farkhanda. But instead of improving her marriage and establishing a new home, Ladli Begum dies of cholera a few months after her reconciliation with Farkhanda.[508] Thus, we clearly notice that the woman who initiates separation or imagines any termination of her marriage was an object of censure and criticism; not even capable of 'reforming' herself. In the pursuit of familial harmony, the woman who questioned her marriage and acted with *khud-mukhtārī* (self-empowerment) and without her husband's permission would not enjoy the merits of conjugality or 'respectability' as the good wife. In the second part of the novel, Farkhanda remarries and his second wife, Masūmā is an opposite image of Lādlī Begum. Not just skilled at managing her home, Masūmā is also an avid reader of magazines like *Tahzīb-i Nisvān, Ismat* and *Tamaddun,* admires authors like Nazīr Ahmad, Hālī and Shiblī Nomānī, and has read appropriate texts like Muhammadī Begum's *Rafīq-i Arūs*. [509] She and Farkhanda are happy together, and raise a family.

While separation remained a repugnant scenario for many stalwarts of reform, the issue of the collapse of marriage could not be avoided and was intertwined with the issue of divorce, the Muslim practice of *mehr* and matrimonial legislation.

Like the issue of polygyny during the colonial period, divorce too attracted the attention of Christian evangelicals who rejected its legitimacy in most circumstances. As mentioned in the previous chapter, William Muir, one of the best known evangelical commentators on Islam, saw the presence of divorce, polygyny and slavery in Muslim societies as an evidence of the inherently corrupt nature of Islam and proof of its

[508] Ibid., 114.
[509] Ibid., 140-157.

'backwardness.' Not surprisingly, Muslim modernists such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Sayyid Ahmad), Syed Ameer Ali (Ameer Ali) and Maulvi Chirāgh Alī (1844-1895) took to defending divorce and re-interpreted the practice as humane and just in light of the colonial-evangelical assault. Comments by these modernists were informed almost entirely by the refuting of the evangelical perspective regarding the Islamic acceptance of divorce. They defended divorce against the charge that it violated the sanctity of a sacred tie and claimed that its approval in no way demonstrated that Islam had depreciated the high value of marriage.

Sayyid Ahmad opens his article on divorce with an allusion to Christian evangelicals and a direct reference to the critics of Islam. He writes that "the issue of divorce is amongst the accusations that the opponents of Islam, either out of stubbornness or out of flawed argument and misunderstanding, have made against Islam."[510] The basis of this accusation is that divorce is "opposed to sympathy, love and compassion." [511] Sayyid Ahmad first examines the practice of divorce in different religious traditions and identifies three types of religious jurisprudence on the issue of divorce. First is that of Jews where the husband is permitted to divorce his wife for any reason, the second is that of Christians and some sects of idol worshippers where it is illegitimate except in conditions of rape, and the third law is that of Muslims where divorce is legitimate if the relations between husband and wife are characterized by complete disagreement and lack of love, so much so that nothing can salvage their relationship. Sayyid Ahmad says that the Jewish law is under threat of unfairness, that of Christians and idol worshippers is

[510] Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Masla-i Talāq," *Maqalāt-i Sir Sayyid*, *Vol. 13,* Muhammad Ismail Panipati, ed., (Lahore: Zareen Art Press, 1963): 266.
[511] Ibid., 266.

against 'human nature,' whereas that of Muslims can protect culture and the values of society.[512]

Commenting on the general nature of conjugality, Sayyid Ahmad says that the nature of this alliance and the character of its intimacy is such that whatever problems develop in it, no one except the two involved in it can gauge its true conditions. Thus, if conditions in marriage deteriorate so much that a divorce becomes a possibility, Islamic jurisprudence has placed the onus to determine those conditions on the opinions and temperaments of husband and wife only, and made them the judge of their ethics. [513] Given the uniqueness of this relationship, according to Sayyid Ahmad, Sharia has placed rules and regulations on how men and women should conduct themselves with each other in marriage. Men are commanded to always have love for women and to treat them with empathy, while women are commanded to obey men, and to be loving and loyal towards them. On the issue of divorce, Sayyid Ahmad says that Sharia made it permissible but also called it unfortunate. For Sayyid Ahmad, this does not establish Islam's disrespect for marriage, because in addition to admonitions and restrictions on divorce, Sharia also mentions processes and procedures that could ensure the success of marriage and the possibility of reconciliation in a bad marriage.[514]

Regarding the custom of three 'divorces,' Sayyid Ahmad argues that the custom has been developed to allow reconciliation between husband and wife after the first and second 'divorce.' If after the separation of their first 'divorce', the husband and wife decide to reconcile and live together again, their 'divorce' is nullified and marriage

[512] Ibid., 266-67.
[513] Ibid., 267.
[514] Ibid., 268.

restored, with no need for a second marriage. If, however, they separate again, the couple is allowed to rethink their decision of 'divorce' a second time as well and resume marital relations, but if the occasion for another separation or a third 'divorce' arises, it must be final and the marriage is formally severed. [515]

Praising these steps as important restrictions on divorce, Sayyid Ahmad regards them as being consonant with human nature and affirms that

> these restrictions aren't just walls or channels but are restrictions of human nature and violating them is to exit from the boundary of humanity. Thus, when those who object to divorce understand this fully and contemplate on human nature, then they will confidently, without doubt, comprehend that this command is the command of the One who has created human nature.[516]

From Sayyid Ahmad's appreciation of the method of divorce in Islamic jurisprudence, it is clear that not only did he view it as a necessary practice, but much like his larger approach to questions of religion, he addressed it through the framework of 'human nature' and argued that religious injunction agrees with the complexity of 'human nature.' But what is unusual about his commentary on divorce is that it is not necessarily consonant with his perspective of 'natural theology.' Contrary to the perceived understanding on 'natural theology,' Sayyid Ahmad's employment of 'human nature' here doesn't draw upon rational scientific developments but is based more on a philosophical and literary notion of 'human nature' that incorporates the vices and misdeeds of a human temperament. To account for such a disposition, Sayyid Ahmad felt that divorce was a form of necessary evil for society.

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[515] Ibid., 268.
[516] Ibid., 269.

Along with Sayyid Ahmad, Ameer Ali too commented on divorce in his seminal work *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad* published in 1873. According to Ameer Ali, the right to divorce in all parts of the world from the beginning has been " a necessary corollary to the law of marriage but this right, with a few exceptions, was exclusively reserved for the benefit of the stronger sex."[517] Ameer Ali here mentions the legality of divorce in Jewish as well as ancient Roman tradition and to buttress his views characterizes them as "the two most prominent nations of antiquity whose modes of thought have acted most powerfully on modern ways of thinking and modern life and manners." [518]Although they did admit divorce, Ameer Ali says that in both the Jewish and the Roman law only the husband could give wife a divorce while the wife had no right to sue for marital dissolution.

After giving references of Romans and the Jews, Ameer Ali comments upon Arab society. He argues that Arab men before Prophet Muhammad had 'unlimited' power to divorce their wives without any recognition for the sentiments of the wife. For Ameer Ali, although the Prophet Muhammad looked upon the practice of divorce with disapproval, he did not entirely abolish the custom because of "emergencies which, as long as human nature continues in its present condition, must necessarily arise at times in the bosom of families."[519] Citing verses from the Quran, Ameer Ali says that "the frequent admonitions in the Koran against separations; the repeated condemnations to

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[517] Syed Ameer Ali, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad* (Edinburgh: William and Norgate, 1873)*:* 236.
[518] Ibid., 237.
[519] Ibid., 238-39.

heal quarrels by private reconciliation show the extreme sacredness of the marriage tie in the eyes of the Arab legislator."[520]

The use of the term 'human nature' here by Ameer Ali highlights that both he and Sayyid Ahmed were similar in their approach to the question of divorce. While they addressed the criticism leveled at polygyny differently, they both argued that divorce should not alarm those who understood 'human nature' and its defects, and that it did not infringe upon the religious decree upholding the marital contract. In his revised second edition of *The Life of Muhammad* published in 1891, Ameer Ali further made a direct criticism of the Christian understanding of the divorce sanction in Islam saying that "as usual, the 'Fathers of the Church' have taken up the temporary permission as the positive rule and ignored the principles of humanity, justice and equity inculcated by the Master."[521]

In addition to Sayyid Ahmad and Ameer Ali, Maulvi Chirāgh Alī (Chirāgh Alī) was also prominent in reformist movements of late nineteenth century and wrote extensively on political and social conditions of Muslims. Chirāgh Alī was the eldest of four brothers, his siblings were Vilāyat Alī, Ināyat Alī and Munsab Alī. Muhammad Bakhsh, Chirāgh Alī's father, was born around 1821 and found employment with East India Company in the town of Meerut because of his knowledge of English. During his years of work, he was transferred to several towns including Saharanpur in current Uttar Pradesh and Sialkot in Punjab in modern Pakistan, eventually retiring from the town of Shahpur, situated in Bihar. Despite an active professional life, he died at the age of 35 in 1856

[520] Ibid., 241.
[521] Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam,* (London: W.H Allen & Co. Ltd: 1891): 347.

when Chirāgh Alī was twelve years old. After his father's death, Chirāgh Alī's mother moved to Meerut, where Chirāgh Alī spent his adolescent years. [522]

Chirāgh Alī received his primary education in Urdu, Persian and English, and was first employed as a clerk in the district of Gorakhpur. In 1873, he transferred to Lucknow where he met Sayyid Ahmed Khan and developed a deep relationship with him. Sayyid Ahmad's ideas influenced Chirāgh Alī strongly and he very soon became a close ally of Sayyid Ahmad in the Aligarh movement. [523] A compendium of modernist ideas, Chirāgh Alī's best known work, *The Proposed Legal, Political and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States* was published in English in 1883 to counter the critique that Islam was not capable of reforms. The book was translated into Urdu and published as *Azamulkalam fi Iritqa al-Islam* in 1910 from Hyderabad.

In his *The Proposed Legal, Political and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States,* Chirāgh Alī explained why Islam allowed divorce and how the sanction improved relations between husbands and wives in society. Like Ameer Ali, Chirāgh Alī says that men divorced women in pre-Islamic Arab society without any respect for the wife and that "passion, interest and frivolity were daily motives for divorce." [524] Commenting further on early Islamic society, Chirāgh Alī interprets the custom of three 'divorces' as a reform of the tradition of '*eela*.' According to Chirāgh Alī, the Prophet Muhammad rectified the abuse of *'eela'* where the husband separated arbitrarily from his wife for a period of time without any future assurance of return.

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[522] Munawwar Husain, *Maulvi Chirāgh Alī kī Ilmī Khidmāt* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Library, 1997): 11-12.
[523] Ibid., 13-4.
[524] Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and other Mohammadan States* (Bombay: Education Society's Press Byculla, 1883):130.

Chirāgh Alī says that the Prophet fixed the time of separation at four months after which the husband and wife had to reconcile their differences or have a final divorce.

Based on the reform of '*eela,*' Chirāgh Alī explains the decree for three 'divorces.' He argues that since there were no limitations on how many divorces or temporary reconciliations people could have, husbands often left their wives and then returned to marriage again if they felt differently and did not wish to divorce them. Striking against the erratic nature of this practice, Chirāgh Alī says that Prophet Muhammad thus limited the ritual of 'divorce' to three in which the third one was considered the final decision after which reconciliation was not permissible. [525]

Despite the present of two 'divorces' and a third final divorce, Chirāgh Alī clarifies that "even under the circumstances of ill-treatment or cruelty on the part of the husband, or refractoriness on the part of the wife as well as in general breach and incompatibility between them, the Koran has not allowed divorce as an inevitable necessity."[526] Chirāgh Alī, like Sayyid Ahmad and Ameer Ali, cites the Muslim belief that the most disliked act in the eyes of God is divorce. Drawing on Qurānic verses related to divorce, Chirāgh Alī demonstrates that the primary aim of divorce legislation in Islam was not to violate the sanctity of the marital contract but reconciliation, and both restriction to only two 'divorces' and permission for a third final divorce had positive consequences for Arab society. He writes that "these impediments as well as other conciliatory measures rendered separations more rare. Ample time was allowed for mutual consideration in the hope of bringing about a happy termination."[527] Chirāgh Alī thus supported the

[525] Ibid., 132.
[526] Ibid., 134.
[527] Ibid., 136.

institutionalization of three 'divorces' agreeing with Sayyid Ahmad that it was a step beneficial to conjugality.

Based on the effect of these restrictive measures, Chirāgh Alī argues that " it is a great mistake to suppose that Muhammad gave free allowance to the facility of divorce or let it pass on the easiest terms" and that "he never permitted a husband to divorce his wife without any misbehavior on her part, without any legal procedure or appearing before a tribunal of justice."[528] Furthermore he adds that "all the rules and regulations mentioned in the Koran, specially those of later times in which separation is tolerated are for the cases of extreme domestic discord, antipathy between the husband and wife, and their strong incompatibility to love together."[529]

In his concluding remarks, Chirāgh Alī also briefly discussed Christian views on divorce and argued that Christ did not interfere with the social and political institutions of the countries in which he lived and in denouncing divorce he "simply shared the public opinion regarding the scandalous divorce and marriage of Herod Antipas, which was already denounced by John the Baptist and against which the public opinion was powerfully opposed" and that "had such a case been brought before Muhammad, he would have also shared the same public opinion."[530]

In the late nineteenth century, Muslim modernists approved and commended divorce against evangelical attacks and found its implementation in three 'divorces' to be in harmony with reconciliation and marital success. More importantly, their elaboration of

[528] Ibid., 138-39.
[529] Ibid., 139.
[530] Ibid., 141, 143.

three ‘divorces’ produces a different understanding of divorce than that prevalent in Christian tradition, and also clarifies some confusion vis-à-vis the modern legal tradition. As is clear from the analysis of Sayyid Ahmad, Ameer Ali and Chirāgh Alī, if the husband and wife reconciled once or twice and were together again, their suspension of conjugal relations for those periods of time would not lead to the dissolution of the marriage. Such a practice, in the perspective of modern law, would not be called divorce but a separation. Only when the final decision is made to end the marriage is the divorce final, which according to the reformers could also be made on the first or the second occasion. An overview of the views of Muslim reformers also illustrates that Muslim modernism of late nineteenth century understood three ‘divorces’ very differently from the contemporary stereotype of male-dominated Islamic ‘triple *talāq*’ where the husband can dissolve the marital contract through the simple verbal formula of saying *talāq* thrice.

Despite these clarifications by Muslim modernists, nevertheless, what is important to note in these writings is the absence of any notion of woman’s agency where the wife can initiate the demand for a divorce and terminate her marriage if she so desires. This point appeared both in English writing and in Urdu women’s magazines in the twentieth century. Divorce continued to be a topic of conversation in the twentieth century as well and acquired unilateral attention of the Muslim community during the ratification of the Muslim Marriages Act of 1939. Both Muslim politicians and Urdu women’s magazines devoted space to the unpleasant issue of termination of marriage.

Mushir Husain Kidwai (Kidwai), a member of the Muslim League, wrote several tracts in English on women’s issues and also general politics pertaining to colonial conditions of Muslims. Elaborating on the nature of divorce in Islam, Kidwai says that there are two

kinds of divorce: the first is *talaq-e sunnat* which is based on the rules laid down by Prophet Muhammad and is thus "regular or proper" while the second type called *talaq-e bidat* is the "irregular" mode of divorce borne out of the need to "escape from the strictness of the law" [531] According to Kidwai, the law of Shia Muslims and the Maliki school does not validate *talaq-e bidat* whereas the Hanafi and Shafai schools of thought agree that *talaq-e bidat* is valid [532] For Kidwai, the fundamental distinction between *talaq-e sunnat* and *talaq-e bidat* is that in the former the husband must give a divorce in the course of three months so that the intention to "separate from the wife is not a passing whim but is the result of a settled determination" whereas in the latter "the husband may pronounce the three formula at one time" [533] Expressing his disapproval of *talaq-e bidat,* Kidwai says that "no Muslim worthy of his faith or with any honor would take recourse to it,"[534] and that "no Muslim who has any respect for the Prophet will indulge in the Immediate Divorce" [535] He also questions whether three immediate '*talaqs'* are actually three or just one, saying that "the majority say that they should be taken as three but the truth is with the minority."[536]

Thus Kidwai shared his approval of the practice of a gradual separation and divorce like the earlier reformers but also added his criticism of the 'formula' of 'immediate divorce' by claiming that it was disrespectful of Islam and Prophet Muhammad. The word *bidat* that he employed to described this practice also suggests his view of 'authentic Islam.' *Bidat* means accretion or distortion of the original and by suggesting

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[531] Mushir Husain Kidwai, *Divorce* (Lahore: The Muslim Book Society, 1920): 18-19.
[532] Ibid., 19.
[533] Ibid., 19.
[534] Ibid., 20-21.
[535] Ibid., 22.
[536] Ibid., 21.

that 'immediate divorce' was an accretion, he attributed reconciliation and a more thoughtful process of marital dissolution to Prophet Muhammad's actions and the Quran, dismissing any other method of dissolution as a wrongful deviation.

Besides differentiating between *talaq-e sunnat* and *talaq-e bidat*, Kidwai also affirmed that Islam was the only religion that gave women the authority to divorce their husbands. In cases of a dissolution of marriage in Islam, according to Kidwai, the husband is obliged to pay all money stipulated in the pre-nuptial agreement to his wife and "thus the power of divorce is given in a way to the hands of a woman." [537] Explaining this conclusion, Kidwai adds that at the time of a woman's marriage, the pre-nuptial settlement "which would be payable at her demand or in cases of divorce is high enough to keep the divorce in her hands" [538] Besides these advantages for women, Kidwai also insists that the permission for divorce in Islam is only for "exceptional circumstances" and that the Quran has "laid great stress upon reconciliation" so that "in the absence of serious reasons no Mussulman can justify a divorce in the eyes of either religion or law." [539]

By making the unusual claim that Islam permits divorce for women, Kidwai attempted to refute the charge that men could easily abuse their power to divorce especially under Hanafi law. Although he insists repeatedly that Islam allows for divorce only under strict conditions and that the wife must be treated kindly, he only briefly in conclusion suggests measures that women could take to prevent any abuse of male license to divorce. According to Kidwai, it would be beneficial for Muslim women when getting married to

[537] Ibid., 14.
[538] Ibid., 14.
[539] Ibid., 17.

note that "prenuptial agreement should be substantial particularly that part of it which is payable on demand, so as to be a financial check on divorce, " that "some condition to this effect be introduced into contract-that there will be no divorce unless by mutual consent" and that "a polygamous marriage will not be permissible." [540]

All the issues pointed out by Kidwai including the preventive measures in the marital contract to check arbitrary divorce, mutual consent and woman's initiative to end her marriage were tackled in the Urdu women's press before Kidwai and had received a lukewarm response from some important quarters.

Divorce remained a difficult and ticklish subject, and wasn't as easily broached in women's magazines as other issues of marriage. But the efforts of some bold women did sometimes permeate through the continuous calls for ameliorating marriage published routinely in the pages of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat,* and highlighted the necessity and travails of marital dissolution. Commenting on the abuse of divorce, an author described only as 'mother of Mumtāz Hussain', wrote:

> selfish Muslims now have started to use divorce in an abominable way where accusations are used mercilessly to remove the voiceless wife as if she were a bad organ for the sake of egoistic desire and temporary gain. She is thrown out of the house, robbing her of dignity and respect. [541]

Comparing the condition of divorced women to that of widows, she further adds:

> the way the lives of divorced women are destroyed would perhaps not even hold true for widowed women. People express sympathy for widows or help them, or at least consider helping them a divine reward but only an attitude of censure and

[540] Ibid., 23.
[541] Wālida –i Mumtāz Hussain "Talāq" *TN* Vol. 18 No. 4 (23 January 1915): 41.

reproach is kept for divorced wives….tyrannical, selfish husbands in order to gain justification for their actions also make them the target of their condemnation.[542]

Although the author refrains from directly criticizing Islam, she asks if "it is possible that this is what Islam taught?" In her response, she affirms, "Never. Islam has strongly criticized such divorces." [543]

Bringing up the issue of mutual consent, the author wishes that Islam had made mutual consent the cornerstone of marital dissolution the way it had made mutual consent the foundation of the marital contract. In cases where the consent of the wife for divorce is not gained, the author reports that such women carry the danger of being separated from their children, an extremely harsh cruelty that the author felt belied female temperament. In her conclusion, the author asks Muslims to be wary of non-consensual divorces because "such divorces can shake the throne of God and will certainly bring doomsday." [544]

In response to the essay, Mumtāz Alī wrote that it was important to note that divorce was considered a permissible but an unfortunate practice in Islam. Just as doctors give alcohol to their patients for some types of medical treatment, Mumtāz Ali argues that Sharia has similarly allowed for some practices deemed despicable to alleviate certain inflictions. Based on this reasoning, Mumtaz Ali says that when some people do not differentiate between the sacred and the profane, they abuse divorce to appease their immoral self, and fail to distinguish between divorce as a necessary act and divorce as an

[542] Ibid., 41, 42.
[543] Ibid., 42.
[544] Ibid., 42.

immoral act. This incapacity for distinction works in much the same way when one, for instance, cannot distinguish between alcohol as a medicine and alcohol as an addiction.[545]

Following this argument, Mumtāz Alī then dismisses the author's suggestion that consent of both partners like the marital contract be a necessary condition for divorce. If divorce were to become a matter of choice and agreement, it would, according to Mumtāz Alī, become nullified as a necessary, unfortunate act, and transform into a desirable, free one. We note here that because divorce was never viewed as a positive event in either the man's or the woman's life by several influential reformers including Mumtāz Alī, Sayyid Ahmad, Chirāgh Alī or Ameer Ali, the concept of advocating mutual consent in matters of divorce was absurd. Thus, how notions of consent and equality were to be implemented in marital dissolution remained unclear in the debates on divorce till almost the 30s.

To defend himself from any misunderstanding, Mumtāz Alī adds that he has always had great affection for women and he suffers deep trauma and pain whenever there is any injustice against them or when their rights are violated. Mumtaz Ali here introduces preemptive marital stipulations that could check an abusive divorce. Instead of arranging marriage to a man who would behave so unpredictably as to divorce his wife for no legitimate reason, Mumtaz Ali wondered why parents arranged such matches for their daughters or why they did not secure prenuptial agreements and fixed conditions at the time of *nikāh* to prevent such eventualities. Asking women in the community to show greater consciousness, he says that women should become aware that remaining single

[545] Mumtāz Alī, "Is par hamārī rai," (Our Views on This) *TN* Vol. 18 No. 4(23 January 1915): 42-43.

for life was better than marriages to men who could have second wives or who could divorce. It wasn't a matter of shame that a woman could not be married at the appropriate age but a disgrace for the community that there weren't enough good men to secure marriages. [546]

From Mumtāz Alī's views, it becomes clear that mutually agreed dissolution of marriage was a contested terrain and the issues associated with the male abuse of divorce could not be met by simply advocating mutual consent. For Mumtāz Alī and others like him, to divorce was to inflict a form of deserving punishment, a grim necessity, upon the spouse who had violated the marital contract and did not merit the blessings of companionship. But even though divorce initiated by women had little acceptability, the practice of *khula* that allowed women to end their marriages was championed and received greater support in Urdu women's press than the demand to initiate divorce.

In Islamic law, *khula* refers to marital separation initiated by the woman and unlike *talāq,* which refers to the severing of a marital contract by the husband, *khula* requires the approval of a *qāzī* or a religious jurist who should agree with the woman if she desires to leave her husband and thus grant her the permission for separation. Several writers felt that *khula* was necessary to ensure that women could leave bad marriages without being labeled irreligious. In such an argument, the writer often resorted to historical glorification of the past involving an era of early Islam where jurists allowed women to freely end their marriages but that the custom had now been abandoned in favor of distorting rituals. Zafar Jahān Begum, for instance, argued that with the weakening of the spirit of Islam and of Muslim rule, there were no jurists left who would permit any

[546] Ibid., 43.

woman to dissolve her marriage. As a result, Zafār Jahan Begum felt that in order to safeguard rights of Muslim women, it was necessary either to find similar jurists or ask the British government to ensure that *khula* is an option available to women in civil courts across the country. [547]

Following a similar line, Sayyid Imtiaz Alī Tāj, son of Mumtāz Alī, argued that while *khula* was permitted under Muslim law, Anglo-Muhammadan Law during the colonial period had reversed positive changes for women. The law enacted by the colonial government gave men the power to divorce but omitted the possibility of *khula* for women. Muslim men who approved of the Act, according to Imtiaz Alī, were perhaps afraid that women under British rule would gain too much freedom and that it was best to employ the government to strengthen their own social power in society at the cost of women. [548]

Beyond the religious framework, writings in favor of *khula* also attacked notions of 'saintliness' expected from 'good' wives and the associated prescriptive norms of femininity. One writer, Basharat Ahmad from Jhelum, argued that those who insist that women should struggle to improve their marriage and establish marital harmony instead of leaving their husbands were imposing a burden that exceeded the limits of human nature. [549]Although there was little doubt that many women in *sharīf* families were trained in measures of 'respectability' and would not cease their efforts to maintain their

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[547] Zafar Jahān Begum, "khula kā rivāj honā chāhiye," (There should be a custom of khula) *TN* Vol. 32 No. 49 (7 December 1929): 1181.
[548] Sayyid Imtiaz Alī Tāj, "masoda qanūn-i faskh-e nikāh" *TN* Vol. 38 No. 49 (7 December 1935): 2059.
[549] Basharat Ahmad, "khula kī zarūrat āj hindustān mein kyun nahīn," (Why isn't there a necessity of khula in India today) *TN* Vol. 32 No. 50 (14 December 1929): 1205-1206.

marriage, such resilience, the author noted, came at a high price of emotional and psychological stress. Women deserved the same companionship and happiness from their husbands that the husbands had from their wives and if a wife were a saint, it was then obligatory for the husband too to be a saint. If, on the other hand, the author asks that the husband were a devil, shouldn't the wife use *khula* to leave him? [550]

Continuing his forceful claims for *khula,* Basharat Ahmad invoked the growing phenomenon of religious conversion among Muslim women to nullify their marriages. He mentioned that he had witnessed within 'respectable' *sharīf* families cases of conversion from Islam to the Arya Samaj or Christianity because the law provided them with little options for exit from a bad marriage. [551] The threat of apostasy that Basharat Ahmad intensified amongst during the 30s and provoked debates that led to Muslim Marriages Act of 1939.

Basharat Ahmad also criticized the view that special Islamic courts needed to be opened to permit *khula,* arguing that the Islamic practice of *talāq* was already in effect in English courts and that any objections to legal decisions in favor of *khula* were an attempt to ensure special privileges for men. Finally, Basharat Ahmad tackled the claim that women who initiated *khula* would be looked down upon in society saying that such attitudes were unlikely and those who would behave in such a way had animalistic natures that had acquired no distinction between right and wrong. [552]

Most writings on separation and divorce either lamented the freedom of men to obtain a *talāq* or emphasized the urgency to implement *khula.* But some also focused on the

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[550] Ibid., 1207.
[551] Basharat Ahmad, "khula ki zarūrat āj Hindustān mein kyun nahin, 2," *TN* Vol. 32 No. 52 (21 December 1929): 1225.
[552] Ibid., 1227.

husband's insistence on not giving a *talāq* when the wife wanted one. Shahzād Jahān Begum from Agra deplored that a large number of women in abusive marriages wished to separate but their husbands would not divorce them. As a result they were neither able to live a married life nor a single life. In these circumstances, women either lived with their parents and had not met their husbands in years, or they rebelled against the family and converted to another faith. [553]

To collaborate her views, Shahzād Jahān mentioned that she knew two young women who lived with their respective families but, to her surprise, were well beyond their marriageable age. Upon enquiry, she found that they had been married as children and were unable to adjust in their husband's families. Things had come to such a pass that they eventually separated from them and their parents were now insisting that their husbands give them a divorce, so that the women could marry again. But the husbands were adamant in their refusal to divorce them and kept them trapped in a deadlock as the wives passed their years without any meaningful married life. [554]

The discussions on divorce and *khula* reveal two different types of approaches in the question of marital dissolution. Most Muslim male modernists defended divorce against the charges that it exposed Islam's casual and disrespectful attitude towards marriage. But they remained inattentive to its distinctly male prerogative, expounding instead on the meaning of three 'divorces' and the emphasis on reconciliation in Islam. When the question of the abuse of male power to divorce was broached, Mumtāz Alī did not criticize the privilege openly but, like Mushir Husain Kidwai, argued for greater and

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[553] Shahzād Jahān Begum, "talāq nā denā," (Not giving Divorce) *TN* Vol. 36 No. 24 (17 June 1933): 563.
[554] Ibid., 563-64.

stricter prenuptial agreements to preempt such actions. To offset this power, the probability of mutual consent in divorce was proposed by Kidwai but didn't find much support in those involved at the heart of women's issues such as Mumtaz Ali. On the other hand, *khula* was aggressively promoted as an acceptable means to dissolve a marriage on the initiative of the wife and Zafar Jahān Begum even suggested the possibility of State intervention to ensure that it be implemented. Furthermore, it is only in the advocacy of *khula* that writers, at least in the Urdu women's magazines, voiced their fears of apostasy, which were also increasing elsewhere among groups not strongly supportive of women's rights. The issue of apostasy was closely related to the Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 and the larger question of State intervention in family life. Before a comment on the Act, it is important to understand the debate on matrimonial legislation in the Urdu women's press.

Law and Marriage

Law was one of the most important instruments in social reform movements in colonial India. The abolition of sati in 1829 and Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856 sought to improve the condition of women through State intervention and have been studied extensively in feminist scholarship. Amongst Muslims, the Anglo-Muhammadan law was based on the legal code drawn largely Arabic and Persian scriptures and produced a new politics of Muslim identity.[555]

Rochona Majumdar has argued that "an important characteristic of matrimonial legislation, under the aegis of both the colonial and the postcolonial state, was the attempt

[555] Michael Anderson, "Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India" in David Arnold and Peter Robb, ed., *Institutions and Ideologies: A SOAS South Asia Reader* (Curzon Press, 1993): 165-85.

to secularize Indian marriages by diminishing the role of ritual, religion and caste observances in the performance of weddings." [556] She demonstrates how the Marriage Act of 1872 revealed deep fissures on the question of Brahmo identity and the strong hold of Hindu rituals in the performance of weddings despite the passing of the law.[557] The Act effectively introduced the notion of civil marriage and allowed the State to conduct marriages when the inividuals involved weren't part of their religious communities. Although the Act did not regulate marriages in any effective way, its implications for a different kind of marriage than the one sanctioned by ritual or religion resonated with Muslim reformers.

In 1911, Mumtāz Alī asked his readers what and how Muslims could benefit from application of the Marriage Act of 1872 and if it could expedite familial reform in the Muslim community. [558] He argued that Muslims had so far avoided having this debate by claiming that the laws of Hindus was deficient and needed help from the State but that Sharia laws were perfect and that there was thus no need for government to interfere in familial lives of Muslims. Without disapproving of the claims of Sharia's perfection made by the critics of the Act, Mumtāz Alī said that the social conditions of the lives of Muslims were such that a legal intervention had become necessary for them to solve their problems. Giving the example of *khula* and *talāq,* he said that Islam allowed the husband to end his marriage in a *talāq* and the wife to terminate it through *khula* but *khula* could only be done by the mediation of a *qāzī* and no *qāzī* was willing to oversee a *khula*

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[556] Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2009):167.
[557] Ibid., 182-97.
[558] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj," (Marriage Law) *TN* Vol. 14 No. 37(16 September 1911): 445.

because they didn't wish to support marital separation initiated by the wife. [559] In such circumstances, men had gained undue liberties and privileges over women while the women had been left without any advantages. To redress these social conditions, it had become necessary to ask government for assistance and such action was not 'unjust intervention' on behalf of the government but was indispensable for making amends in how marital lives were conducted and a service to the welfare of Muslims across the country. [560]

Continuing his argument, Mumtāz Ali further elaborated the conditions surrounding the arrangement and performance of marriages, which made the implementation of the 1872 Act for Muslims necessary. According to Mumtāz Alī, when men marry, they insist on two positions. First is that they want the amount of *mehr* (prenuptial settlement money) to be as low as possible and secondly, they don't want any stipulations from the bride's family which would prevent them from a future polygynous marriage.[561] On the other hand, when their daughters are getting married, they adopt an entirely different posture towards their future son-in-law. They want the *mehr* to be unrealistically high and insist on every guarantee against polygyny. Mumtāz Alī then mentions a case amongst his close friends, one of them was a lawyer and wanted the strictest conditions against polygyny in his daughter's marital contract. But he was repeatedly told that it would be futile because Sharia granted the husband the permission for polygyny and that would remain in effect all the time. Such contradictory provisions, Mumtāz Ali, felt were

[559] Ibid., 446.
[560] Ibid., 446.
[561] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj 2," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 38 (23 September 1911): 460.

causing harm to the community and the law had the potential to minimize such conflict and disagreement.

In order to ensure that there was a movement in favor of the Act, Mumtāz Alī suggested a signature campaign amongst Muslim women and proposed that if all readers of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* could gather around ten signatures in the Act's favor from other women, and send it to *Tahzīb's* office, they would manage to secure more than ten thousand signatures. He said that the *Tahzīb* office would print several copies of the petition and then dispatch nine copies to any reader who was interested in gathering signatures. These signatures would then be sent to Lady Hardinge, wife of Lord Hardinge, the then Governor-General and Viceroy of India to draw the attention of the government. [562]

Given the unconventional bent of Mumtāz's Alī's views especially on polygyny, he had to repeat his arguments again to calm and pacify his critics. Maintaining his stand against the abuse of polygyny, Mumtāz Alī said that men were only permitted to have more than one wife in Islam but they weren't obliged to and could be good Muslims otherwise as well. As for those who felt that the government should not interfere in religious matters, he argued that several aspects of the Sharia law were already in the hands of the government and that instead of asking any *muftī* or *qāzī* to enact their religious legislation, many Muslims would happily visit the legal courts to solve their problems. [563]

It should be noted here that despite Mumtāz Alī's unpopular insistence on allowing the State to intervene in religious life, he made consistent efforts to ensure that religious sentiments weren't offended and that the implementation of the Act was not viewed as an

[562] Ibid., 461.
[563] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 40 (7 October 1911): 483.

assault on Sharia and Islamic practice. On the contrary, Mumtāz Alī clarified that the Act of 1872 would ensure that Sharia is fully implemented and that with government intervention, he and his supporters were enabling those socio-political conditions that would endorse Sharia fully and not 'incompletely.' He felt, for instance, that governmental legislation could open the option of *khula* for women trapped in bad marriages, which orthodox *qazis* weren't willing to offer and thus re-introduce Sharia.[564] In Mumtāz Alī's vision, the essence of Islam was oriented towards justice and gender equality, and corrupt intentions and base natures had violated the essence of Sharia and turned it into an unfair practice. Mumtāz Alī even suggested that the implementation of the Act would not outlaw polygyny for Muslims but only ensure that those husbands who promised, at the time of wedding, to remain monogamous in their marital contract would not be able to violate their vow easily. This would provide the wife's family certainty that stipulations made in the *nikah* to guarantee wife's happiness aren't broken at a whim. [565] Mumtāz Alī's clarifications suggest that just as the Act when originally ratified in 1872 did not disqualify marriages that contradicted its tenets, Mumtāz Ali's proposal to open the Act to Muslims too would not openly challenge the status quo. But the initiative nevertheless received enthusiastic support from many Muslim women living in different parts of the country.[566]

One woman from Poona wrote in to express her endorsement of Mumtāz Alī's ideas saying that there could not be a more noble deed for women in this world than support for the 1872 Act, and that her views on this issue weren't likely to change in the future. S.

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[564] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 37 (16 September 1911): 446.
[565] Sayyid Mumtāz Ali, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 40 (7 October 1911): 483.
[566] For a full discussion of the Act, see Majumdar's *Marriage and Modernity,* 177-182.

Hussain from Allahabad said that Mumtāz Alī's column on marital laws was an extremely delightful read for women and she wished that more women would support him in his endeavors. Concluding her support, she asked Mumtāz Alī to send nine copies of blank petition forms.[567] Ayesha Begum also wrote to express her strong support and hoped that the Act be ratified for Muslims. She urged other women to participate in the campaign and do everything in their capacity to obtain signatures. Noting the urgency of the moment, she expressed her fear that if the Act is not implemented now, it may never come to pass and that Mumtāz Alī had demonstrated greater compassion for women than their brothers and fathers. In addition to signatures, she also asked readers to be generous and donate money for the cause if necessary.[568]

In response to these letters, Mumtaz Ali reiterated his support for the Act and asked women to discuss the campaign in their own family gatherings or when they met other women in the neighborhood. [569] With Mumtāz Alī's encouragement, more supportive articles followed. Akbarī Begum from Azamgarh voiced her enthusiasm for Mumtāz Alī's ideas but worried that she was not very literate and could only get three to four signatures. Mumtāz Alī suggested that she could ask any educated woman to write the names of all those who couldn't sign and illiterate women could stamp their left thumb against their names.[570] Mrs. Ikrām Alī from Quetta said that the enforcement of the Act

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[567] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Qānūn-e Izdivāj par Khawātīn Ahl-i Islam kī Rai," (The Opinion of Muslim Women on Marriage Law) *TN* Vol. 14 No. 40 (21 October 1911): 507.

[568] Ibid, 508.

[569] Ibid., 508.

[570] Akbarī Begum, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj par Khawātīn Ahl-i Islam kī Rai," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 43 (28 October 1911): 524-25.

was met with approval and respectability in her family, and it was a test to see if men could also contribute their signatures and prove that they were indeed true to their promise of women's rights. [571] Abbasī Begum from Hyderabad wrote that with his calls for matrimonial legislation, Mumtāz Ali had proven himself to be for Muslim women what Sayyid Ahmad Khan was for Muslim men in the late nineteenth century. She noted that after starting a journal, writing weekly columns in support of women, organizing meetings and associations amongst like-minded reformist women and raising funds for schools as well as for *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* Mumtāz Alī had the courage and idealism to galvanize a campaign for equitable laws and approach the State for its implementation, with support from women. [572]

Not all responses, however, were in favor of Mumtāz Alī. Maulvi Amīnullāh, lawyer from Ghazipur, made the usual counter-claim that any attempt to stop polygyny was retaliation against God's words and no Muslim would support any such campaign. On these charges, Mumtāz Ali repeated his assurance that the Act would not make polygyny illegal but only allow stronger enforcement of anti-polygynous vows taken at the time of marriage. He also expressed puzzlement that the lawyer had not followed his arguments given that he had reproduced them thrice in his articles on marital legislation. [573]

Although the usual objections to Mumtaz Ali resembled views like that of Maulvī Amīnullāh, they were sometimes also rooted in the international politics of European

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[571] Mrs. Ikrām Alī, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj par Khawātīn Ahl-i Islām kī Rāi," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 43(4 November 1911):538-39.

[572] Abbāsī Begum, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj par Khawātīn Ahl-i Islām kī Rāi," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 46 (18 November 1911): 564-65.

[573] Maulvi Amīnullāh, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj par Khawātīn Ahl-i Islām kī Rāi," *TN* (4 November 1911) 539-40

imperialism and the global conditions of Muslims in the rest of the world. One woman who didn't wish to be named disapproved of asking the colonial government for any help in assisting the campaign for Muslim women's rights because she felt that Britain's support of Italy during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911 proved that the British had no regard for the sentiments of Muslims, or for their efforts aimed at betterment of their societies. The author argued that following the Italian invasion, it would be humiliating and amount to subordination to ask the colonial government to intervene in social reform. She enjoined Muslim women to show solidarity with the Turks and resist calls for any legal cooperation with the colonial government.[574]

Mumtāz Alī sympathized with the woman's views and agreed that the British government had betrayed their Muslim subjects in India by ignoring their appeal to withdraw support for the Italian invasion. But he still insisted that Muslims should not distrust the British government. Just as Muslims worry about helping and serving their fellow brethren, Mumtāz Alī argued that one can expect that the dominant Christian population of Britain would be agreeable with the policies of Italy. Therefore the British government is expected to conform to the interests of the British population instead of the Turks. With this understanding, he said that Muslims should approach the colonial government for assistance because it would serve the interests of their own community well. [575]

The exchange between the unnamed woman and Mumtāz Alī is significant because it points to differences not between progressive supporters of reform and more conservative

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[574] Khātūn, "Qanoon-e Izdivaj par Khawateen Ahl-e Islam ki Rain," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 45 (11 November 1911): 553-54.

[575] Ibid., 553.

opponents of governmental intervention but to differences within reform movement itself that were borne out of anti-colonial sentiment and anger against the racist policies of empire. Although Mumtāz Alī argued against the woman in favor of governmental intervention and resolved the issue raised by her, the dilemma of supporting social reform and also opposing colonialism simultaneously was an unsettling position to advocate and a challenging predicament that only intensified with the growth of nationalism and anti-colonial movements in the twentieth century.

The fate of Mumtāz Alī's initiative remains unclear. There was considerable excitement in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* for almost two months and the magazine published supportive letters almost every week. But it seems that the petitions didn't add up to ten thousand. Akbarī Begum who had expressed her endorsement earlier shared her disappointment that the number of supportive letters were waning, and reproached *Tahzīb* readers for complacency saying that bolder enthusiasm was needed from women if Mumtāz Alī were to succeed in his efforts. [576] It would be important here to browse other kinds of Urdu press besides women's magazines to see if Mumtāz Alī provoked a debate amongst men in news dailies as well and what kind of resistance he faced if he did. Both the possible silence as well as resistance in the Urdu press is critical because it highlights the challenges reformers faced when they proposed open, public action instead of just discussion in favor of reform.

One of the matrimonial laws that, nevertheless, did produce public action involving the State was the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 (1939 Act). The Act was in response to the increasing conversion of Muslim women to other faiths due to their

[576] Akbarī Begum, "Qānūn-i Izdivāj par Khawatīn Ahl-i Islam kī Rai," *TN* Vol. 14 No. 48 (2 December 1911): 585.

inability to escape oppressive marriages within the framework of Hanafi Law, which was followed predominantly in India. [577] The growing problem of religious conversion and the necessity to enact some form of marital dissolution for women had been pointed out several years before the ratification of the 1939 Act by writers like Basharat Ahmad in the debates on *khula*. Imtiaz Alī Tāj also noted the urgency of passing a law to enable divorce for women and called upon all readers in *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* to support the Act when it was introduced in the Legislative Assembly. [578]

The 1939 Act allowed Muslim women to obtain a judicial divorce for reasons of cruelty, ill-treatment, inability to maintain and venereal diseases. [579] Rohit De has argued that "debates over the Act reflected two recurring themes in discussions about Muslim personal law in South Asia-the centrality of gender in questions of law reform and the struggle between two notions of Muslim law-first that it is divine and unchanging and second, that it allows for creativity and human changes."[580] Through a perusal of Central Legislative Assembly debates, he demonstrates how the 1939 Act managed to achieve a consensus between a wide variety of disparate groups invested in social reform such as women's organizations, members of other communities, politicians and Assembly members, *ulema* and progressive activists.

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[577] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 303-305.
[578] Sayyid Imtiaz Alī Tāj, "masoda qānūn-i faskh-i nikāh" *TN* Vol. 38 No. 49 (7 December 1935): 2061.

[579] Lucy Caroll , "Talaq-e Tafwid and Stipulations in a Muslim Marriage Contract: Important Means of Protecting the Position of the South Asian Muslim Wife," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 16 No. 2 (1982): 278.
[580] Rohit De, "Mumtaz Bibi's Broken Heart: The many lives of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 46, 1 (2009): 107.

According to Rohit De, the 1939 Act challenged the normally assumed binary between gender equality and Islamic law, and found a common ground for the exercise of Islamic modernity. [581] The most significant step in this direction came from the efforts of Ashraf Alī Thānavī who in his book, *Hilat-e Najiza, yani: Auraton ka Haq-I Tansikh-I Nikah,* defended the Muslim woman's right to divorce based on the adoption of Maliki law instead of the Hanafi law.[582] The 1939 Act thus continued the uniquely colonial exercise of re-interpretation and re-reading of religious scripture and jurisprudence in favor of reform. [583]

'Mehr' and the Economy of Marriage

It wasn't just colonial law that had a direct bearing on separation and divorce but also social practices that accompanied marriages particularly agreements stipulated at the time of marriage. As hinted in the discourses of Muhsir Husain Kidwai and Mumtāz Alī, the convention of *mehr* could be used as a preemptive check against the abuse of divorce and was thus, along with legal reform, closely intertwined with the prospect of marital dissolution and divorce.

One of the most important decisions to be taken at the time of *nikah* was to stipulate the amount of *mehr* to be paid by the husband to the wife. In Muslim ritual, *mehr* is the money that the husband must pay to the wife in exchange for his marriage to her. There are two kinds of *mehr: mua'jal* and *majal.* The first refers to that money that is paid promptly at the time of *nikah* whereas the second, *majal,* is that *mehr* that is paid

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581 Ibid., 120.
582 Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars,* 304.
583 Barbara Meltcalf, "Reading and Writing about Muslim women in British India," in *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan,* ed. Barbara Metcalf (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

afterwards at the husband's convenience. Although *mehr* is mandatory, in most Indian families, if the marriage lasted, it was never given and a custom of wife 'forgiving' the husband before his death over non-payment of *mehr* eventually developed. In such a cultural framework, demanding *mehr* meant that the marriage was under stress and that it was usually paid at the time of divorce.

Given the nature of exchange involved in *mehr,* it was not surprising that the family of the bride at weddings often used it to their own material benefit and personal advantage. The amount of *mehr* remained a key point of dispute in the performance of weddings. Writers complained that the bride's families felt great pride in managing to secure a high *mehr* from the husband's family but that it caused inconvenience to the latter. [584] The bride's family often rationalized the demands for a high *mehr* as a long held familial custom or a form of guarantee against the possibility of the husband divorcing his wife unfairly in the future. [585] A high *mehr* could ensure that the husband didn't abuse his power to divorce without any regards for sentiments of the wife or for the future of their children. But a high *mehr* also increased the possibility of failure of payment. When a high amount was fixed, some felt that the husband and their family only agreed to the amount for the sake of pacifying the bride's family and never had any intention to pay money to the wife. Calling such practices sinful, they argued that a high *mehr* was encouraging false intent and neglect of religious duty. [586]

The possibility of the non-payment of *mehr* was an oft-repeated argument against high *mehr* directed at bride's families. Khwāja Muhammad Aslam argued that a high *mehr*

[584] Mrs. Maulvi Muhammad Zakī Onāvī, "Mehr" *Ismat* Vol. 7 No. 2(August 1911):12.
[585] Ibid., 13.
[586] Ibid., 14.

demanded by the bride's family increased the prospect of non-payment almost by fifty percent. He felt that a moderate sum could not be decided easily by mutual agreement since the husband's family insisted on any amount they perceived low and the wife's family expected a high sum. To resolve this predicament, the best means to decide upon the correct sum of *mehr,* according to Muhammad Aslam, was to base it on the material capacity of the husband and not on the wishes of the wife's family. [587] Any *mehr* that wasn't in the husband's capacity to give, says Muhammad Aslam, became invalid, and when *mehr* was invalid, the marriage didn't have any legitimacy.[588] He also added that *mehr* should be made into a 'marriage tax' and paid monthly or yearly according to the husband's capacity. A moderate *mehr* also made sure that wives weren't compelled to 'forgive' it and husbands remained bound to pay. [589]

Women wrote back to refute these claims for an appropriate *mehr* based on the husband's capacity. They objected to Muhammad Aslam's labeling of high *mehr* as invalid and his characterization of such marriages as illegitimate. Regardless of the husband's status or capacity, they asserted that any amount of *mehr* was valid and a low value did not make the marriage unlawful. [590] They also dismissed the claim about husband's capacity for *mehr* saying that the order in Islam is that the amount of *mehr* is the decision of the wife, not of the husband, and the law has dictated the acceptance of that amount by all parties. If the husband cannot pay an amount asked by a particular woman, then he must marry someone who would agree to a lesser amount. [591]

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[587] Khwāja Muhammad Aslam, "Mehr" *Ismat* Vol. 8 No. 3 (March 1912): 57-58.
[588] Ibid.,58.
[589] Ibid.,60.
[590] H.T Begum, "Mehr," *Ismat* Vol. 8 No. 6(June 1912): 77.
[591] Ibid.,77.

Other women felt that it was absurd to ask wives to lower *mehr* while ignoring other social conditions emerging in society particularly increasing consumerism and commercialism. According to them, men routinely asked for the latest and most expensive fashions in their weddings, and most of them were hardly following a pious life of Sharia but never hesitated to raise elaborate claims of husband's capacity when it came to *mehr.* [592] They felt that it was better to stipulate an amount based on the wife's demands, whatever it may be. The sum could be acquired from the husband once his financial condition improves. [593]

These debates about *mehr* raised questions about the legitimacy of marriage and the authority of the bride to make decisions about the marital contract. Women continued to dispute Muhammad Aslam's categorization of 'invalid *mehr'* and 'illegitimate marriage.' They argued that *mehr* was necessary because of a marriage instead of marriages being necessary because of *mehr.* [594] Insisting on the wife's authority to decide upon *mehr,* they said that if husband's capacity had predominance over wife's discretion, then *mehr* would have been settled based on the past *mehr* traditions of the husband's family and not of the wife's, which was the norm. [595] They also added that in cases of high *mehr,* the wife could lower the amount due afterwards or even 'forgive' it if she wished but that it was highly unlikely that the husband would give later an amount higher than the one stipulated during the wedding even if he had the financial means to do so. [596]

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[592] Kh. B, "Mehr," *Ismat* Vol. 7 No. 6 (December 1911): 39.
[593] Ibid., 40.
[594] M.B, "Mehr," *Ismat* Vol. 8 No. 1 (July 1912): 9.
[595] Ibid., 10.
[596] Ibid., 13.

As mentioned earlier, women often secured a high *mehr* to ensure that the husband wouldn't divorce his wife on a whim without apparent reason. But a high *mehr* didn't always work in the wife's favor when it came to securing marital happiness. Besides the arbitrary nature of divorce, women also worried about being trapped in a bad marriage if their husbands refused to give them a divorce. A common reason, women complained, for this stubborn conduct was that the *mehr* was very high and the husbands could not pay the due amount, which was likely to be demanded if the divorce occurred.[597] This critique of high *mehr* is particularly important because despite all the conversation on ensuring sum in favor of the wife, the convention in Indian society was that *mehr* was usually paid in cases of divorce and 'forgiven' otherwise. Thus the practice of *mehr* became both an instrument of safety and of entrapment for women. A high *mehr* enabled them to restrict their husband's authority to divorce, which they didn't have under Hanafi law but at the same time, it also kept them confined to a troubled marital relationship.

While debates on how to reconcile differences or secure a divorce for a bad marriage in appeared magazines as well as the courts, the lives of men and women had a far more complex reality and an event like marital separation or divorce if it occurred was a deeply transformative one. What was the possible nature of marital separation? Could it happen in one of the 'reformed marriages' touted in *Tahzib-e Niswan*? How did women cope with its effects and what was the role of education in it? To answer some of these questions, we may turn to the life of Syeda Bano Ahmed.

[597] Shahzād Jahān Begum, "talāq nā denā," *TN* Vol. 36 No. 24 (17 June 1933): 564.

Syeda Bāno Ahmad: Marital Separation and Intimacy against Convention

Syeda Bāno Ahmad (Syeda) was married on February 5, 1933 to Abbas Raza (Abbas), a civil judge, based in Lucknow. From the beginning, she remained alienated from conjugal bliss and her tumultuous marriage ended in separation in February 1947 followed by her arrival to Delhi in August during the stormy days of Partition. In Delhi, she met Nuruddin Ahmad, a lawyer working for the Supreme Court who was married to an English woman. Nuruddin had left for Britain with his wife and children in 1947 and returned to India alone in 1949. From then onwards, he and Syeda had a passionate affair that lasted almost 27 years. By examining closely the collapse of Syeda's marriage and her transition to Delhi along with a brief description of her relationship to Nuruddin in post-independent India, we can grasp the conjugal expectations of a woman raised in the educated Muslim *sharīf* culture of colonial India and the challenges she faced as an independent woman following her separation.

The arrangement of Syeda's marriage was an unexpected event for her. One day she heard that her family received a marriage proposal for her involving a match to Abbas. Describing her reaction to the proposal, she writes, "When I heard about it, I got very worried…I could not understand how two strangers could be joined in such an intimate relationship. Therefore, I immediately wrote a letter to my father that I wanted to do other things in life and that I wasn't remotely ready for marriage. I wrote a four page letter and never received any acknowledgement of it."[598]

Syeda's marriage was a lavish occasion involving extensive fireworks, singing and dance performances by courtesans. But Syeda was in little mood for enjoyment. Her

[598] Syeda Bāno Ahmad, *Dagar se Hat kar: Khud Navisht* (New Delhi: Sajjad Publishing House, 1996): 34.

letter had been disregarded and she felt the weight of "entangled thoughts and oppressive feelings which evolved into a face of consistent rebellion and unease….I was angry all the time" [599] While her friends would insist that she take delight in the display of extravagance, she only wept.

Not surprisingly, her first few interactions with Abbas were unfriendly and somewhat confrontational. On their first encounter when Abbas asked Syeda to lie beside him, she retorted, "I don't even know you and I have never seen you before." Stunned by these words, Abbas asked her, "what are you talking about, what do you mean?" She responded, "I want us to live like friends, once we become acquainted, then we'll proceed." [600]A shocked Abbas quietly turned away and went off to sleep.

Syeda attributes this conversation to her own thinking about status of women in society. She writes that while was she raised to be patient and conform to duty, a "confusing anxiety about injustice against women had started to raise its head. After all they are also humans, why should they be considered cattle. It is these sentiments that allowed me to converse without hesitation with my husband."[601] Reflecting about this episode in her autobiography several years later, Syeda at the same time also gives mixed impressions to the reader about her resistance. Viewing her attitude as naïveté, she says that "I was completely unfamiliar with the sensual aspect of men and its relevance for conjugal life. Today, when I think back, I realize how unacceptable my behavior would have been for Abbas saheb, what feelings of debasement he would have experienced." [602] Syeda seems to have rejected almost all romantic overtures by Abbas. On another

[599] Ibid., 36.
[600] Ibid., 40-41.
[601] Ibid., 42.
[602] Ibid., 45.

occasion, Abbas commented on her clothes saying, "your *dupatta* is very beautiful. How was it made?" Syeda responded bluntly, "with a needle." [603]

The first few days after the wedding ceremony were characterized by the performance of several rituals at the groom's home in which Syeda was dressed up and adorned by female members of the family and streams of guests visited to have a view of the new bride. In an atmosphere of merriment, laughter and cheerful banter of family and friends, Syeda felt isolated and lonely. She writes repeatedly that her marriage forced a change in her way of being and she became alien to her own earlier playful self. Born and raised in Bhopal where her father Majid Husain was employed in the court of Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal, Syeda had a carefree and joyful childhood and was given considerable freedoms to travel, shop, play sports, go for picnics and watch films. Syeda attributed her open upbringing to the influence of social reforms initiated by the Begum of Bhopal. Describing the Begum's influence, Syeda writes that "my childhood was similar to those of average middle class homes. The only difference was that I was born in Bhopal where women had ruled for four generations. The weight of a woman's say was strong here. The stifling atmosphere of sexism that existed in North India was not present here." [604]

After her primary education in Bhopal, Syeda was sent to the city of Lucknow in 1925 for her secondary education and she completed her schooling at Karamat Hussain Muslim Girls High School, expressing greater interest in sports than in academics. After her schooling, she acquired a B.A from Isabella Thornton College in Lucknow. Syeda felt that transitioning from such a past to her marriage was a difficult experience and says that:

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[603] Ibid., 42.
[604] Ibid., 13.

> whatever little light that had been introduced into my education became a nuisance for me…especially this thought had settled that entangling two unknown individuals into the bond of marriage was a great injustice. Along with this, I didn't have the strength for implementing principles into action. These were just the thoughts of an unsophisticated, undisciplined girl who lived in the world of dreams.[605]

Despite her anguish during the initial days after her marriage, Syeda had to learn to adjust and accommodate her personality to her new life. Here she mentions that living with the extended family of Abbas helped her cope with some of her alienation. She writes that over time the kindness of her mother-in-law, Begum Reza, and her sister-in-law Aqeela were crucial in pacifying feelings of unease and strangeness. The role of both Begum Reza, Syeda's mother-in-law and her own mother, as we will see later, is extremely important in Syeda's life. She drew great strength from their compassion on every major decision that she made and throughout her autobiography, she reserves the best judgments for them.

Syeda refers to the consummation of her marriage only implicitly when she says that "Abbas saheb during the day treated me kindly in front of everybody and during the night turned his face away and went off to sleep while I remained awake feeling gloomy. And then one day, in a strange way, we became friends."[606] But her marriage did not improve and adopted an inconsistent, schizophrenic pattern. It was now characterized by phases of great love and intimacy interrupted by difficult days of bitterness and coldness. After a few months, a particular pattern emerged in their troubled relations. Abbas would become

[605] Ibid., 44.
[606] Ibid., 45.

completely quiet for two to three days and not say anything to Syeda. After a few days, when she would inquire about his silence, he would simply deny it. [607]

Besides the emotional separation between them, Syeda conjectures that their poor marital relations were also rooted in problems outside their relationship. Compared to his other brothers Kasim Reza, Hashum Reza and Masood Reza, Abbas was employed in the local provincial government whereas they had all high imperial jobs in the colonial regime. It wasn't unusual, informs Syeda, for relatives to spend hours on their social visits comparing and gossiping about the status of the four brothers in particular the low achievements of Abbas. While Syeda herself didn't care much about the perceived status of Abbas's job, she felt that his regular humiliation by gossipmongers affected his confidence and self-worth. Commenting on child rearing practices of those days, she says "that even though elders insisted on respect and discipline amongst children, if there were any psychological problems and complexities in the boy or girl, it was simply said that it'll go away once they grow up."

Over time, Syeda came to understand better Abbas's mood swings and ignored his silences as well as chattering of other family members in order to continue with her life. Her two sons Asad and Syed were born in 1935 and 1939 respectively and they brought sufficient motherhood responsibilities and stability of routine. But this stability unfortunately was short-lived. In 1942, Abbas suffered an insect bite in his eye, which permanently affected his eyesight. This only worsened his relations with Syeda. Their fights were now more intense in which they hurled accusations at each other and Abbas often went into patterns of rage when they started to talk about what was troubling him.

[607] Ibid., 52.

Just as they were struggling to cope and improve whatever was left of their marriage, Abbas one day tragically suffered another eye injury of the same severity in his second healthy eye. The collapse of their marriage was now almost complete. Abbas submitted his job resignation because he was unable to read and write properly. Days now sometimes passed without any proper conversation between Syeda and Abbas and then Abbas would suddenly come in to apologize attributing his behavior to poor health and frustration. At such times, both often cried together. There would be a brief respite of after such episodes and calm days followed.

Except for her mother-in-law, Syeda writes that no one in the family including his brothers cared about his deteriorating condition and he was never close to either of them. Eventually, one night in February 1947 after an intense argument, Abbas packed his bags and left without informing anyone. After a few days of worry and ceaseless search, he was discovered in Bhopal and informed his family that he did not wish to return to Lucknow. Syeda leaned heavily on the aid and comfort of her mother and mother-in-law during those days. She now had to choose between staying in Lucknow or leaving for Bhopal. Confronted with the burdensome possibility of raising her sons in Bhopal on meager money, she was hesitant about asking for any kind of financial assistance from her brother, After several days of continuous anguish over the pending decision, Syeda decided to leave both Lucknow and Bhopal, and headed for Delhi.

Before 1947, she had done some voice recording for the radio in Lucknow and applied for a job at All India Radio in Delhi. She was offered the job and asked to join by 10 August 1947. But, despite the employment, there were other issues in moving to Delhi. She knew no one in Delhi, was unsure about how to settle there, or how to raise the

children alone. The future and welfare of Asad and Syed, her sons, were to be crucial factors in any decision. Few people could give Syeda any advice and Abbas's brothers, said Syeda, did not wish to be involved in the decision. Finally after several days of stress and anxiety, she approached Mrs. Greyhurst, the principal of La Martiniere School in Lucknow who advised her to admit her elder son Asad at Sherwood Boarding School in Nainital.

Sending Asad to Nainital at the age of 12 was one of the toughest decisions of Syeda's life. Upon dropping him at the school, Syeda writes that she walked considerable distance from the school gate and when she turned around, she saw Asad still standing at the gate looking at her. "This picture," she says, "is carved clearly in my eyes even today. What he would have been suffering and what emotions I had to suppress to separate in such a way from him cannot be expressed."[608]

Following Asad's admission in Nainital, Syeda left Lucknow with Syed, her smaller son and a caretaker to arrive in Delhi on 9 August 1947, just prior to Partition. Writing about this move, she says, that

> I broke the chains of a very comfortable and safe life to acquire a support-less life of a single individual…The conditions of the time and my own conscience forced me to turn my gaze away from the gossip of family members, criticisms of society and the comfortable life of Lucknow to manage myself the gamble of life.[609]

She further adds that "my un-educated mother and mother-in-law endured this with much patience and stoicism for which I will always be grateful to them… They did not

[608] Ibid., 129.
[609] Ibid., 136.

criticize, weren't scandalized and didn't lament it with anyone." [610] She was received at the station by a family friend Iqbāl Husain and stayed at their home for a day. Here she briefly met Nuruddin Ahmad, an acquaintance of Iqbal Husain's brother. Instead of renting a separate house, Syeda decided to put up at YWCA hostel in Delhi. But the plan didn't immediately materialize. In order to escape the attacks on Muslims in Delhi, Syeda and her son had to move to the spacious home of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai whose house had become a mini refugee camp for several Muslims of Delhi. She lived at his house for the whole of 1947 and moved back to YWCA hostel in January 1948.

While at YWCA, in December 1949, Syeda was one day greeted by Nuruddin. He told her that he had lost his home in the riots and that while he had returned to India, his wife and children lived in London to ensure safety. Gradually, Nuruddin started to visit Syeda more regularly. In the early days, Syeda did not see feel intimacy for him but saw that he was a good person who was missing his wife and children. They would have conversations about his children and general politics of the country. He would talk about his family, praising his wife and shared his fondness for his kids.

One day, after having dinner together, Nuruddin sat near her feet and expressed his love for her. Overwhelmed by this, Syeda writes, "Oh my god, what good days we were having. Why did this mountain fall?"[611] Nuruddin insisted that they could continue meeting only if Syeda had any feelings for him. Both eventually agreed that they would stop seeing each other. But it was only after this encounter that Syeda felt a strong love

[610] Ibid., 136.
[611] Ibid., 185.

for Nuruddin. She writes, "now that we stayed apart for a week, I realized that he had settled in my heart in such a way that I thought about him every moment." [612]

If Syeda now loved Nuruddin, she also knew fully well the obstacles in her way. Nuruddin had a family waiting in London and she also worried about the effects of this relationship on her children. Yet, when Nuruddin showed up at her doorstep again, Syeda writes that "my heart leapt with joy."[613] In the flurry of a budding romance, Syeda nevertheless always worried about Nuruddin's family and once wrote a letter to him saying that he should end this affair and to not make her a 'sinner.' [614] She devised tricks to evade him, and would often lock her YWCA apartment when he came to meet her. When he left for London for two months in 1951, she didn't respond to his letters. But this only strengthened Nurudddin's resolve who wrote to his friend characterizing Syeda's silence as "a matter of life and death." When Nuruddin returned from London and met Syeda again, she writes that she had lost the interest to resist him and felt "he had won and I had lost. Now whatever happened was part of my fate, which I couldn't overthrow."[615]

Meanwhile, Bilqees, Nuruddin's wife, was a Jewish English woman whom Nuruddin had married in young age and who had converted to Islam after their marriage. Nuruddin, Syeda mentions, had had affairs with other European women before Bilqees and it wasn't scandalous for him to be romantically involved with women. After meeting Syeda, Nuruddin however fell into a dilemma from which he couldn't escape. Syeda writes that in Nuruddin's eyes, "she was an unusual Muslim woman" to whom he was attracted

[612] Ibid., 186.
[613] Ibid., 187.
[614] Ibid., 190.
[615] Ibid., 190.

instantly.[616] Syeda, on the other hand, had a rather mixed opinion about Nuruddin. Of him, she says that "Nuruddin was a person of decency, principals and generosity. But at his heart, he was an old style *sharif* male. There were love affairs and he also wanted to maintain roots of a family." [617]

When Bilqees returned to Delhi in 1955 and confronted Nuruddin about the affair, she demanded that he end his relationship. Suffering from tension and bitterness in his home, Nuruddin conveyed the message to Syeda suggesting that they part company. They separated after a long, tearful encounter but Syeda was unable to accept Nuruddin's absence in her life and felt that "even a telephone call would have been sufficient to keep me alive" [618] Like before, neither Nuruddin nor Syeda could keep their promise of ending the affair and after a gap of ten days, Nuruddin visited her again and now his visits turned into a pattern of his life. Interestingly, before Bilqees's return in 1955, whenever Syeda asked Nuruddin about his wife, he would simply say that she would either accept Syeda or leave him. Syeda remained unconvinced by Nuruddin's reasoning and likewise, Bilqees neither accepted Syeda in her life nor ever left Nuruddin.

Despite the stress in their relationship, Nuruddin and Syeda continued their passionate love affair throughout their life. Reflecting back on the relationship, Syeda says

> today when I write this, it seems childish. But at that time, to see his eyes, to meet him for a few minutes were matters of life and death… Like the travelers of the last night, we played this youthful game till the age of 60, 65 and even 70. What strange proclivities are engendered by prohibition.

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[616] Ibid., 201.
[617] Ibid., 202.
[618] Ibid., 203.

As for these 'prohibitions,' Syeda and Nuruddin learnt to navigate their romance in society. After Bilqees returned from England in 1955, Syeda never went out with Nuruddin and he only visited her at home. Her loved ones remained supportive and she writes that "children, relatives, friends never called me undignified. They kept the prestige of my lifestyle, treated me with respect and maintained a relation of regard and reverence for Nuruddin too" …."this attitude of friends and dear ones nourished my courage and gave strength to my independence." [619]

The death of Abbas in 1968 and Bilqees in 1969 paved way for one more drama in the life of Syeda. One day, unexpectedly, Nuruddin took Syeda to a mosque and upon reaching there informed the imam to conduct the *nikah,* of which Syeda had no previous knowledge. "My heart jumped," writes Syeda, "at least, he could have told me earlier… but such caution was not part of Nuram's uniqueness." [620]

The conditions of Syeda's life including her turbulent marriage and passionate affair reveal to us the remarkable opportunities and conflicts that lay at the heart of Muslim social modernity. Syeda's marriage was the reformist ideal in every way: a Syed lineage, a family of lawyers and barristers, open-minded in-laws and an educated couple in Syeda and Abbas. Yet its messiness demonstrates unresolved issues of reformist ideology. In Syeda's own words:

> our society was somewhat perplexed. The external conditions weren't such that we could be courageous enough to act upon our thoughts, that we understand each

[619] Ibid., 226.
[620] Ibid., 256.

aspect of the diversity of life and that we choose a middle way between the old and the new paths. This capacity had not been born.[621]

Yet Syeda's departure from Lucknow to Delhi instead of to Bhopal also illustrates what became possible after the social transformations of early twentieth century. In the construction of her autobiographical self, Syeda projects this move as the linchpin of her 'rebellion' where she opted for the tougher trajectory at the most crucial juncture of her life. What is noteworthy here is that it was the social support of women like Syeda's mother and mother-in-law, the 'uneducated women' (as she calls them) who escorted her through this transition and not Abbas's brothers or Syeda's sister, who continued to insist for several years that she return to Bhopal. As beneficiaries of 'modern education,' the attitude of Abbas's brothers and Syeda's sister negate any easy and direct connection between social support for separated women and the colonial agenda of familial reform. The personality of Nuruddin Ahmad is also a fascinating feature of our story. His remarkable insistence that Bilqees would accept Syeda resembles the false belief of several educated *sharif* men that a polygynous relationship was an acceptable alternative to the first marriage that never worked because the first wife wasn't the "Muslim woman" that they were seeking. The text of *Dagar se Hat kar* therefore provides a story of changes that became visible in the Muslim familial space after the introduction of women's education.

Conclusion

The ideology of colonial reform was concerned primarily with preserving the family and authorized certain norms of relationships for stability. These norms were deeply

[621] Ibid., 36.

entrenched in upholding marriage as a necessary condition for healthy and happy living. In order to do this successfully, it delegitimized affection outside the marital contract and placed supreme value on the qualities of consent, education and compatibility. These qualities were a reflection of changes transforming Indian society and revealed a growing desire of middle class populations for material comfort, financial stability and social respectability. Within this discourse, the issues of separation and divorce were thus anathema to familial harmony and were denounced by reformers like Bashiruddin Ahmed. In an earlier period, Muslim modernists like Ameer Ali, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Chirāgh Alī defended divorce in Islam against hostile criticism coming from Christian and European intellectuals specializing in Islamic studies.

In the twentieth century, reformers like Mumtāz Alī accepted the practice of divorce in society but hesitated from subjecting it to mutual consent. Rāshid-ul Khairī, on the other hand, remained silent on the issue and thus believed that only reconciliation was the appropriate solution for marital discord. The question of abuse of divorce by men and the right to initiate a divorce by a woman was discussed in women's magazines within the Islamic framework only, with a growing number of writers demanding *khula* by the late 20s. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act in 1939 resolved this issue amid growing fears of apostasy amongst both the *ulema* and Muslim modernists alike.

A better understanding of the ideological work of 'respectable' conjugality, however, can be gained only by inserting realities of women's lives into the story. Syeda Bāno Ahmad's marriage and her affair in later life illustrates the fragile matrix of limitations and possibilities that were enabled by social reform. It also unsettles any easy conclusions about the positive relationship between colonial education and marriage, and highlights

the weakness of the ‘consent, compatibility and education’ formula in solving familial crisis. In particular, both the selves of Syeda Bāno and Nuruddin were products of the colonial encounter, and their idiosyncrasies and subversions exposes wider transformations amongst families of Muslims born in the last decades of colonial rule.

Conclusion

The aim of the dissertation was to highlight and discuss the main issues of marriage and family that attracted attention of Muslim social reformers during the colonial period. I have argued that the story of women's social reform and of their education is incomplete unless we also attend to changes in the domestic space. Reformers belonging to the group of Muslims calling themselves *ashraf* sought to instill and disseminate their vision of 'respectability' or *sharafāt* not only women's education but through the family. In all debates of women's education, what was at stake from the beginning was the 'unity and integrity' of the family, a notion based on harmonious and cordial relationship amongst all its members. Central to this vision of familial harmony was the tie of marriage and conjugal couple, educated husband and wife who were aware of their responsibilities towards their family as well as their community. The ideal of *sharīf bībī* thus was inseparable from and connected to the ideal of *sharīf shādī,* a 'respectable' marriage that upheld the goals of social reform. What emerges in the pursuit of familial harmony that if hegemonic in the reformist discourse is a portrait of 'respectable conjugality.'

One of the most unusual features of 'respectable conjugality' was its domestication of intimacy, a process where all forms of affective attachments were limited and subjugated to the space of family in particular conjugality. Late nineteenth century texts on conjugality such as *Islāh-i Hayāt* sought to contain and check fears of promiscuity and prostitution in society whereas *Hidāyat-un-nissā* strove to inculcate strategies of obedience amongst women. Later in the twentieth century, specific qualities of the husband and wife were articulated and idealized in the Urdu social novel. In addition to

the novel, these qualities also appeared in the pages of Urdu women's magazines such as *Tahzīb-i Nisvān* and *Ismat.* The individual qualities of the husband and wife varied and were contrasted along notions of gender and sexual difference. The husband, first and foremost, was attentive and deeply conscious of the economic demands of raising a family and the urgency of securing employment that would guarantee a basic income to support his family. Such an employment could only be assured through an excellent education. But the qualities of *sharīf* male weren't just contingent upon the material necessities of life; they also involved instillation of family values including respect for parents, piety, self-discipline and the desire for an educated wife. The educated wife, like the husband, was also aware of economic hardships and thus was an efficient caretaker of the home economy. As a symbol of the 'new woman,' she was also involved in reformist efforts within the community such as starting a school, attending *anjumans* or associations and most importantly being well read in reformist literature. Perhaps the most unusual feature of 'respectable conjugality' is the absence of pre-marital love. Although consent was the cornerstone of the debate on modern Muslim marriage, it never implied romantic love but was always determined by practical concerns of life such as income, education or marital compatibility borne out of similar reformist sensibility. This wasn't accidental and was in complete consonance with the ideology of 'domesticated intimacy.'

Were there any tensions in such a portrait of familial harmony? In the second half of the thesis, I have demonstrated the contradictions involved in the idealization of family life. These contradictions are most visible in the discourse on polygyny. Any attempts to publicly criticized polygyny or to pass legislation against it had mixed reception amongst

reformers and was condemned as 'un-Islamic' in the press. Beyond polygyny, issues of separation and divorce also could not be accommodated within a peaceful, reformed family and Syeda Bāno's marriage attests to unresolved issues within *sharīf* families. Syeda Bāno's rejection of her family foundations in both Lucknow and Bhopal, and her beginning of a different life in Delhi illustrates that if differences could not be reconciled within the family, then the whole ideology of familial harmony and its concomitant extended family networks needed to be, and more importantly could be abandoned to secure personal happiness. Her relationship with Nuruddin, an instance of love beyond domestic life, also reveals how the end of colonialism and opportunities in post-Independent India disabled (although not completely) the ideology of 'domesticated intimacy.'

Questions about what was 'Islamic' and what was 'un-Islamic' remained pertinent in reformist debates throughout the colonial period. Issues of wedding rituals, familial practices such as polygyny, women's education, divorce, even dress were all identified as 'Islamic' or 'un-'Islamic.' Islam' and issues of Muslim identity remained a determining presence that informed both what enabled transformation as well as resistance to change. Commenting on the aims and goals of *Tahzīb-i Nisvān,* Sayyid Mumtāz Alī commented that it wished to establish consciousness and spread broad-mindedness amongst the women of India*,* and "that they be able to protect their reform and their rights in the future, that they achieve, alongside men, the status that nature and Sharia has given them in civilization." [622] Varying claims of Islamic feminism and accusations of 'un-Islamic' protest jostled to vindicate and convince an audience of Muslims about the stakes

[622] Sayyid Mumtāz Alī, "Tahzīb-i Nisvān va Khwatīn-ī Hind"(Tahzīb-i Nisvān and Women of India), *TN* Vol. 24 No. 27 (2 July 1921): 418.

involved in the fight for the future. Neither 'Islam' nor 'Muslim' were stable categories and liberal along with conservative voices within the reform movement wished to appropriate religious traditions in favor of their argument. On some occasions such as the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939, there were moments of consensus among disparate groups where the demand for women's autonomy to initiate divorce satisfied both the *ulema* as well as nonreligious groups. Thus family and gender became the sites on which Islam and Muslim identity were redefined during the colonial encounter, and discussions about improving and reforming familial ties was as much about re-imagining a new kind of family as it was about re-imagining a new kind of Islam.

The passing of 1939 Act illustrates developments in favor of women's autonomy but it also leaves many questions unanswered. Legislative Assembly debates and legal reform fails to inform us about the internal family dynamics that led to separation or protest against polygyny or what role the hegemonic discourse of familial harmony, which so many women read and approved of, had in preserving or disrupting marriage. Recent post-colonial developments particularly the now famous Shah Bano case and its appropriation by Hindutva politics has ensured that any debate related to family, women's rights or Islam in the last two decades in scholarly literature as well as in media in India keeps the State at the center of the conversation. This thesis is an attempt to shift the direction of the debate from an exclusive focus on 'personal laws' towards a more socio-cultural understanding of family involving a study of women's voices, shifting ideologies and beliefs, and construction of gender and sexual norms in novels and other forms of representation. Such a focus on socio-cultural history of Muslims is especially

important given that most historical investigations on Muslims in the twentieth century have focused on politics of Muslim separatism or Partition, leaving developments in culture and social life to the origins of the Aligarh movement in late nineteenth century. Instead of substituting, I would wish that this thesis complement the debate on law and family in colonial India.

The site of 'familial reform' was characterized by a series of tensions: between consensual and forced marriages, between marital compatibility and 'unreformed marriages,' between legitimate polygyny and monogamous conjugal couple. All these tensions were constituted by and generated out of a desire to re-adjust and re-imagine a new social order. The visions of this new order underwent many changes and each vision sought to re-structure lives of men and women in its image. What led to these demands and why did family became a site of such manipulation and control?

It is important to note here that desire to renew, to remake and to perfect was not entirely new and much of the didactic intent of novels and women's journals can be viewed as reconstruction of the *akhlāq* literature in Islam. [623] Muslim societies have often placed a strong emphasis on the development of character and acquisition of virtue for living a good life. Even reformers viewed their deeds and their thoughts as a continuation of a tradition. But the effort expended and the range of people sought in the colonial period is a uniqueness of its time. Moreover, there are important transmutations in the notion of 'perfecting' the self that are of great significance particularly the shift from the 'divine' to the social and the mundane within the realm of everyday, family life. This

[623] Barbara Metcalf, "Introduction" in Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 1-22.

transition in form and intensity from the 'divine' to the mundane was a result of the conditions peculiar to colonial modernity. These conditions included urban life, industrialization, modern education that emphasized capability, which could be measured such as income or job or professional degree, influence of liberals idea such as gender equality, the expansion of print media and the growing importance of institutions of civil society all combined to push the material and familial conditions of living into the forefront of acquisition of *adab.* An ethical life of a good Muslim was no more contingent only on philosophical purification of the soul but was taught to attend equally to the immediate and necessary demands of human life such as childhood, marriage, personal finances and education. Thus the discourse of modern familial reform is a cause and effect of modernity itself, which was influenced by past traditions of self-improvement and reform.

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